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Commission On Mission And Theology

01-04 December 2015

Nadi - Fiji

DISCUSSION PAPER

Social - economic - political trends and the role of the churches in the Pacific Islands at the beginning of the 21st century

Professor Manfred Ernst serves as the Director of the Institute for Research and Social Analysis at PTC, and as Professor of Research and Social Analysis (with part-time teaching and supervision responsibilities in the Department of Church Ministry).



Introduction

Ecumenism in the Pacific Islands very much reflects the development and current status of the worldwide ecumenical movement. In a publication titled *'Ecumenism in Transit. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?'*, the author, Konrad Raiser, a former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, talks about general stagnation, uncertainty as regard roles and methods and ambiguity as regards who takes responsibility for the ecumenical movement, and the development of networks of grassroots movements and action groups that have been formed in many churches around the world to address pressing challenges of injustice, violence, oppression and the threat to the environment.

In the Pacific Islands there is a growing tendency toward nationalism and denominationalism at the expense of ecumenical cooperation that leaves the historic mainline churches in a vulnerable position for the future. Therefore, ecumenism in the 21st Century must find fresh forms of expression, new avenues to overcome divisions, and an inspiring vision that spiritually and practically engages the churches and their members.



The main question this paper tries to address is how revived and renewed ecumenical cooperation can contribute to address and help to solve the manifold problems Pacific Island communities are facing today?

This paper is to articulate and present a basic framework and key issues that may assist the conceptualization, design and implementation for ecumenical renewal in the Pacific Islands. With my contribution I hope to bring to light what I deem to be the most important features of the mission context for the churches in view of social, economic and political trends in the Pacific Islands. I have divided this paper into three main parts. First, I will summarize some of the realities in the Pacific Islands today. Second, I will highlight the challenges for the churches deriving from these realities. Third, I will put forward a few recommendations for further discussion. Ultimately, this paper is about the disturbing question 'what does it mean to be church today'?

The need to understand global capitalism

To begin with, I firmly believe that we cannot understand today's social-economic-political trends and the role of the churches in society without first looking at the predominant economic system that is at the basis of all interactions and relations of people and countries all over the world as I will try to demonstrate in the following.

In order to understand the current economic system one needs to understand globalization processes, because these processes facilitated the advance of the currently dominating system of global capitalism. There is no agreed standard definition of 'globalization' or 'globalization processes'. In a previous publication I adopted an approach that is grounded in world-system theory as developed in three volumes by Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989). Wallerstein understands the modern world-system as a capitalist economy based on market trade and commoditization. According to Wallerstein the current world system has its origins in the middle of the 15th century in Western Europe. Another quantitative and qualitative level in the development was the current world system which was reached with the industrial revolution, which began at the end of the 18th century. Following this basic understanding globalization processes have facilitated the spread and dominance of global capitalism all over the world. Therefore it is global capitalism that must be seen as the underlying structure that impacts on all aspects life on earth today, regardless of whether one is European or Pacific Islander, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or atheist, male or female.

In 2013 the Fiji based catholic priest, activist, and advocate of the Poor, Kevin Barr summarized in a document titled 'Criticism of the international and regional financial institutions' the problem of global capitalism as follows:



“it seems that there is a fanatical fundamentalism behind the extreme form of neo-liberal capitalism running rampant in our world today. It seeks to produce ever more money for those with the most wealth with no limits or regulations. Everything is subjugated to corporate profit. The demands of individual greed and unlimited profit have been allowed to dominate the business world and governments are often forced to bow to the powerful lobbies of corporations and business elites. Worldwide there is a very unequal distribution of wealth and development. Some say that our current economic system is one of the most unjust the world has ever seen. The common good, social justice, compassion and concern for the poor are not values in a market – driven economy dominated by greed.”

The context for Christian Ministry in the Pacific Islands

Today, most island nations struggle to develop a practical/relevant/realistic concept of democracy within cultures where communal rights often come before individual rights. In the Pacific Islands there has been a gradual paradigm shift from traditional governance by consensus during the time of colonialism to a Western-style democracy after WWII, mainly since the 1960s, 70s, 80s when most of the islands became independent. This shift has been accompanied by rapid social-economic changes, in particular over the past four decades. The ‘peaceful Pacific’ has, in the last decades of the 20th and the early years of the 21st century, repeatedly erupted in serious ethnic and political violence. (Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga). The indigenous people of West Papua continue to be exploited and subjected to human rights abuses. In recent years most of the conflicts in the Pacific Islands have been caused or fueled by unequal distribution of benefits from mining, logging, fishing, infrastructure development, and education. These conflicts are usually linked to land disputes, poverty, rural-urban drift, unemployment and may lead to broader social instability, political conflict and more violence in future.

The rapid transition from communally oriented societies into “hard cash” oriented societies has contributed to the constant decay of traditional social structures and patterns that for centuries had provided basic security and stability. The different forms of chiefly systems are crumbling everywhere. The ongoing trend of urbanization has further accelerated this process. Over the past three decades more and more slum-like settlements have been mushrooming in the urban centers and capitals of the islands. Public services that deal with human waste, rubbish, and the provision of water and electricity are hopelessly overstrained to handle the ever increasing demand. Poverty, including malnourishment, in the past often seen as not really being a problem in this part of the world, is

spreading fast in the urban areas. In most Pacific Islands where statistics are regularly kept it is clear that the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is steadily increasing.

The statistics relating to the situation of youths provide another gloomy picture of the fast-changing social-economic conditions: there is an increase in most islands in the percentage of teenage mothers, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), child abuse, high suicide rates, and criminal offences committed by youths, often related to the consumption of alcohol and drugs abuse.

The systematic destruction of the environment continues with the pollution of rivers and the ocean. If logging and over-fishing continue at the current rate the Pacific Islands have to expect a future with two of the major traditional resources (fish and forestry) being exhausted. The fact that some of the low lying atolls and coastal lines in the region are going to disappear is not seriously questioned anymore. Rather, the open question is whether it will take another 20, 50 or 70 years before it happens.

Gender imbalance is part of the continuing tension where the notions of male domination and gender equality clash head on. Gender inequality is manifested in obvious and in subtle ways. Some of the ways in which this happens is discrimination in workplaces; lack of representation in education and professions; lack of political participation; and domestic violence. Women's domestic role 'subsidizes' formal employment in a significant way, yet this is not widely recognized.

The former colonial powers, namely Great Britain, France and the United States, still control and determine to a large extent the economies of the island states. The regional powers, i.e. Australia and New Zealand, are often accused of using bullying tactics to promote their national interests through the Pacific Forum. The influence of Asian countries, such as China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, who are interested in the exploitation of natural resources (minerals, oil and gas, fishing, logging), has increased considerably within the last two decades. As a result, the economic and political influence of these countries grows rapidly.

The rise and rapid growth of new religious groups, mainly with a strong Pentecostal-charismatic theology and conservative politics poses increasingly challenges to the established historical mainline churches. The variety of newer churches clearly grows at the expense of the historic mainline churches. Sometimes the resulting tension simmers beneath the surface and sometimes it explodes and escalates into community violence and divisions within communities and extended families.

Beside its beautiful nature and its friendly people we should never turn a blind



eye to all the issues Pacific Island people experience today in their day to day lives. I would like now to talk about the need for Social Analysis and Social Justice in the context of Christian ministry.

Social Justice and the Need for Social Analysis

The method that is known as social analysis helps us to understand better the underlying historical and structural issues at work in situations that need transformation. For a working definition for Social Justice that can be shaped and reshaped in further discussions I would like to suggest "that Social Justice has to do with

- the way in which society is organized in terms of wealth and poverty, labor and leisure, power and powerlessness; and
- the values associated with this social order.

Social Analysis is related to Social Justice because it aims to find ways to address social injustice for the purpose of social transformation. It includes sociological analysis, economic analysis, political analysis, cultural analysis, environmental analysis and religious analysis. Social Analysis is a set of tools or methods that enable us to reflect systematically, on the social reality people are facing.

The Role of the Church in Society

The Christian church is a worshipping body of believers that proclaims the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church also provides a structure for fellowship, evangelism and social development. In the secular world the church is technically one of many non-governmental organizations with major involvement in the areas of education, health or development with enormous potential – often underutilized and sometimes over utilized – in the mobilization of human and financial resources.

In a region where more than 90 percent of the population is Christian any attempt for conflict resolution and development needs to address and include the role of the Churches in the social and political life in Oceania. Why? - It is the church to which people turn in times of uncertainty. Therefore, the Pacific Churches and their leaders, in fact all those who work for the churches, must be prepared - theologically, spiritually and practically - with tools for clear analysis, and a spirit of compassion, integrity and determination. How well are the churches in the Pacific Islands prepared to deal and respond to the manifold challenges emanating from overall rapid social change and an unjust global economic order?

The Protestant mainline churches in the Pacific Islands share a common history. They are relatively recent additions to the panorama of World Christianity. After becoming independent from their mission boards or denominations that brought the Gospel to the South Pacific, the leadership has been thoroughly localized. In an essay published almost 40 years ago, the well known church historian Charles Forman observed that church leaders made up a large part of the new professional and official elite. In my view Forman's observation on the social status of church leaders is as valid today as it was 40 years ago:

"There is probably no part of the world (...) where the pastor has had greater prestige in recent times than in the Pacific Islands. The pastor's position there can only be compared to that of the ministers of colonial New England or of the higher clergy of the medieval courts".

If this is still true today the question arises how the pastors and the churches make use of their potential status and influence?

When I talk about Social Analysis my starting point is to address a very widespread misconception about the biblical, theological basis for Social Analysis and Social Action. I would like to propose that we need to rescue scriptures from those that claim that the scriptures have nothing to do with politics, economics. For too long we have become accustomed to the claim that the Bible is about our spiritual lives only and that we should leave the material world to those who supposedly look after it (the professionals, the politicians, bankers, business, and so on). Social Analysis is an attempt to get to the root causes of what is happening around us. It encourages us to ask questions about society and seek answers. In a nutshell Social Analysis helps us to understand in a systemic way the reality of the world in which we live and helps us to work together in tackling problems to bring about change for greater justice in society. All those of us who present the Christian churches may ask themselves: How does the Christian religion influence the way people think and act in society. We can ask whether the Christian Church today preserves situations of injustice, justifies divisions and conflicts or whether it aims to challenge situations of injustice and conflict in our societies. One of the examples of the global Church was the Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara who challenged structures which create poverty and injustices. He is well known for saying:

"when I give food to the poor I am called a Saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, I am called a communist".

If we reflect on the Pacific churches there is a huge potential of the churches in the Pacific Islands for material and social development which is usually underestimated or not recognized because churches are widely believed to have a role in 'spiritual development' only.



What is this potential of the historic mainline churches of the Pacific Islands I am talking about?

- The churches are deeply rooted in and form a legitimate part of civil society with a huge membership from the local populations that can be mobilized.
- The church leadership has become largely indigenized.
- The cultures in the South Pacific are known as 'cultures of giving'. This includes giving of money, food, skills, and time.
- Pacific Island churches have strong networks of women's groups. Women are often praised by the leadership to be the backbone of the church.
- The churches have a huge and very valuable infrastructure in the form of land, buildings, training institutions, schools, etc. that can be used.
- The Pacific Island churches have a long history in promoting the development of healthy and just civil societies. For example the churches that form and own the regional ecumenical institutions, in particular the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College have shown their capacity – not only to contribute positively to issues of common concern in the struggle for political, economic independence, in advocacy against nuclear testing, in advocacy and programmes that address domestic violence, environmental issues, social justice issues – but also in offering a Pacific Alternative.

In contrast to the huge potential strength of the churches one must also mention the common weaknesses. Here again the question that needs to be answered is how well is the clergy of the churches prepared to deal with the challenges of our times? On this background I would like to quote the former chairman of the Theological Education Fund Committee of the World Council of Churches and chair of the founding committee of the Pacific Theological College, Professor of Missions at Yale University from 1953-1987, Charles W Forman, who wrote in 1992 in an article on the South Pacific Style of Christian Ministry:

“In times of globalization and secularization church ministers and priests need to be more than just good spiritual leaders. Wider contacts, higher levels of education, urbanization and secularization are all making their impact on the islands. Slow-paced, conservative faithfulness is not the most effective way to meet rapid social change or the demands for transformation of life which come with it. Social prestige and sacred power are not likely to withstand the challenge of growing democracy and secularism. Hence, a new style of ministry is becoming necessary”.

Forman had the wisdom and vision to foresee that increasingly, the work of a typical minister or priest requires more and more skills in the area of social analysis, administration, management and communication, peace building, counseling - to name a few important areas. Church leaders and ministers are frequently dealing with thousands of people, volunteers, employees, church groups and last but not least substantial amounts of money. Hence, there is a need to develop and to extend adequate training programmes in the areas mentioned above. In recent years the Pacific Theological College with its Institute for Research and Social Analysis and its God's Pacific People Programme has taken the lead by taking into account the increasing need for ministers and church personnel to be able to analyze critical social developments within their societies and churches, and to develop answers - from a pastoral and Christian point of view - to a range of problems in the mission context of the churches.

Looking at the wider picture of the churches in the Pacific Islands one cannot help to recognize that most of them are, for a variety of reasons, ill-prepared to cope with problems deriving from rapid social change/globalization. It may sound harsh but it has to be said that the Pacific Island churches are generally behind in terms of theological reflection on their social reality. They do not seem to understand fully the new political and social circumstances in which they work and thus are in danger of becoming a static force in a very dynamic society. My argument here is that this has weakened and will continue to weaken the role of the churches in society. If this is true - What are the reasons? To answer this question I would like to quote Paul Abrecht, who wrote in his book *The Churches and Rapid Social Change* in which he described the changing responsibilities of the Christian Churches in view of the social economic revolutions he witnessed worldwide more than half a century ago:

“The most serious obstacle for the church in meeting the challenge of social change is theological conservatism.”

The Pacific Island theologian Cliff Bird from the Solomon Islands argued along the same line of thinking in a paper he presented 2013 at a conference in Fiji in which he identified the following underlying challenges for the churches in the Pacific Islands. Institutionalism and Church Rigidity

- Theological conservatism
- Biblical literalism
- Cultural conservatism

These statements made by Abrecht in 1961 and by Bird 54 years later describe very much one fundamental problem, namely, the need to do more to develop a theological basis for the analysis and criticism of social problems, followed by joint action of the Pacific Churches.



There have been and there are excellent Pacific Island Theologians but they are not enough and it takes time to change the mindset of the majority of church leaders. What Abrecht observed in his study he did on behalf of the World Council of Churches in the wider world context is to a large extent still valid for the majority of church leaders in the Pacific Islands today:

“Theology is for them not an illumination of their social situation and they struggle to see what their confessional tradition has to say about their problem. Very frequently they find that, as presented to them, it has very little to say, and they are torn between the impulse to re-examine that tradition or to question their involvement“.

Because the theological basis for the role of the church in society is weak, the island churches are (with a few exceptions) often silent or uncertain on issues of social justice, exploitation, human rights abuses, politics, governance, corruption or development. When public statements are made at regional or international level by the PCC, they are often not followed up at a national church level. The following words of Catholic Bishop Patelsio Finau, written 24 years ago, unfortunately describe very much the situation today.

“At present there seems to be apathy and frustration with the seeming lack of progress. In general the clergy and church leaders are so busy with maintenance that they forget about mission and ecumenism. Ecumenism is an afterthought. And the people are in the main like their leaders.”

For A Way Forward

For any efforts and activities to take up the challenges as described I would like to propose to consider the following framework for action.

- 1) The Pacific Churches need to understand current trends in history and the socio-economic-political changes. The churches must develop a critical conscience for society, relate themselves creatively to the existing power structures; and participate in the struggle for a participatory and socially just governance model of society.
- 2) The Pacific Churches need to review and clarify their self-understanding in relation to politics. At present the Pacific Island Churches are not over-politicized as argued by some critics, but under-politicized. This is related to a lack of vision and has kept the churches too long in a role of passive spectators of an increasingly unjust socio-political global order.

- 3) The Pacific Island Churches and local as well as regional NGOs should explore possibilities for increased cooperation in areas of common concern to combat the negative consequences of an unjust global economic order and global environmental damages.
- 4) In the center of any vision should be the poor, the exploited, the marginalized, those in need, those without voice and power.

On a more practical level churches should work for radical changes in the currently dominating economic system. This could involve:

- To put people first.
- To restore national and people's control over development.
- To give priority to the poor.
- To make transnational corporations accountable and transparent to civil society.
- To make international organizations (IMF, World Bank, WTO) subject to democratic decision making.

While the influence and impact of the churches on the proposed actions above are limited there are areas where the churches have a high degree of influence to consider the following six statements for discussion, reflection, and decision making.

1. To provide future church leaders during their formation and training with skills and knowledge to perform fully their leadership tasks of providing direction, policy and strategy for the church.
2. Review the selection procedures and composition of boards and committees that are supposed to provide leadership and guidance in decision making. The church is in the world and not out of the world and operates in an environment where corruption and the pursuit of self-interest are the order of the day. In the mission of being salt and light the church leadership would therefore be strengthened and transformed if its people would be trained on values such as integrity, good stewardship, transparency and accountability.
3. In considering leadership development it is important to highlight the biblical model of leadership, which is characterized by servanthood and not ruling over the followers.



4. It is suggested that the Pacific Churches do a critical stocktaking of their historical, social, theological and cultural contribution to the development of the Pacific Islands.
5. There is a need to develop policies, procedures and actions that will lead to greater transparency and participation of women and youth in decision making processes in the Pacific Churches.

Summary

It can be said that upon the Pacific Churches rests a great responsibility for meeting the challenges of rapid social change. The fulfillment of the responsibilities of the churches requires nothing less than a thorough review of their life and reason for existence. The churches need to discover new ways and patterns of witness and service relevant to the context of the people. The current system of neo-liberal globalization needs not only to be constantly and concretely analyzed but also to be rejected and resisted as a matter of faith. The view that the Western liberal model of democracy forms the basis for economic development and wealth for the benefit of all, and should therefore be adopted by the rest of the world, is not only a-historical but flawed, based as it is on the unsustainable exploitation of resources, combined with massive, irreversible environmental destruction, and a deepening global economic crisis that affects the majority of people all over the world today.

To conclude I would like to finish with an inspirational quote from Martin Luther King Jr., who gave selfless service in pursuit of an equal and just world.

“One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.”

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To Gaze At Mercy In The Heart Of Every Human Being



*Fr. Frank Hoare is a member of the
Columbian Fathers Missionary Society
of the St. Columbian Mission Society*

Pope Francis, in proclaiming 2016 a Jubilee Year of Mercy in the Catholic Church says, “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it... Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. (no.2)

Pope Francis declares that “Mercy is a key word that indicates God’s action towards us.” Jesus emphasized the mercy of God in his teaching and actions. The Pope picks up the words, “Merciful like the Father” as a motto for the Jubilee Year. However, while mercy is a characteristic of God’s dealings with us mercy is also predicated of human beings. I would like to explore in this essay how the law of mercy is written in our hearts and how we might access it fully and so as to be channels of mercy in our lives.

An ‘Inspired’ Mercy Overcomes Anger

Years ago, I was friendly with a Hindu family who lived at that time in Suva. I will call the father of the family Raj. He and his wife had a number of children. The eldest was a daughter, whom I will call Baibi. She was a bright girl and got good marks in her U.E. and her Dad, Raj, intended sending her to university in Australia.

While working in an office during the Christmas and New Year period she fell in

love with a young man who also worked there. He came to Raj to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage but was turned down because of the plans to send her to study in Australia.

The next day Baibi went to work but didn't return home that evening. A worried Raj phoned his relatives and friends but there was no trace of his daughter.

The next day Raj went to his daughter's office but she wasn't there. Neither was her boyfriend. Raj got his address and on arriving there found his daughter there with him. He begged Baibi to at least return home so that he could preserve the good name of his family by arranging a wedding for her and her boyfriend. Baibi refused. Perhaps she didn't trust her father to arrange a marriage. At this Raj became enraged and said to Baibi, "You don't belong to my family any more. I will never allow you back into my home. Even if your mother dies, I will not let you come to cry for her."

I visited Raj and his family a few days later without knowing anything about Baibi's elopement. The atmosphere was like a wake. Raj told me the story. Then he turned to me and said, "Father, you and I are good friends. But the day you ask me to accept my daughter back is the day our friendship ends!" I was startled by the vehemence of his challenge. But it made me think.

Later that evening as Raj dropped me home in his car I said to him, "Raj I am sorry but I can't do what you asked. I am a follower of Jesus Christ and he is my guru. He told a story of a father who had two sons, the younger of whom asked for his share of the inheritance and left home, only to squander his father's money in a distant country..." As I continued telling the story we know as the Prodigal Son, I saw tears rolling down Raj's cheeks. I felt embarrassed so when I finished the story I said good night and left him.

A few weeks later when Raj's wife was in town Baibi saw her and ran to her. She cried, "Mammy, I want to come home. My boyfriend started going out with other girls and when I challenged him he punched me and beat me. He doesn't love me. I know I have wasted my life. I want to come home!" Her mother gave out to her but had pity on her. "I don't know about father," she said, "He never mentions your name."

That evening as her father came in from work Baibi threw herself at feet. Raj looked down at her for a few moments and then, turning to his wife, he said, "Give her something to eat."

This was one of the great missionary experiences of my life – to bring a healing word of God to a family in need. It is also an example of mercy in the human heart.

Divided Within

We can find mercy in the human heart because as we read in Genesis 1:27, “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.” Since, as Pope Francis says, the word mercy reveals the very mystery of the Trinity and since mercy is the supreme act by which God comes to meet us, if we are created in the image of God then mercy is a part of our make-up too. We have seen many examples of how people in Fiji and in many parts of the world have been moved by mercy and compassion to help the victims of cyclone Winston. We can be profoundly grateful that mercy abounds in the human heart.

However the doctrine of original sin tells us that though we are created in the image of God and therefore basically good we are born implicated in the original sin of Adam and with a consequent inclination to sin. Our passions are unruly, our instincts are selfish, our human needs are disordered.

Saint Paul experienced a great tension in his life. He spoke about good and evil struggling within him. He said, *“For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. I don’t do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do.”* (Rom.7:18-19) I am sure that many of us have a similar experience. But Paul goes on to ask, *“What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?”* (Rom. 7:24) And his answer, *“Thanks be to God who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ”.* (Rom.7:25) And a little later in Rom 8:2 he says, *“For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death.”* We too have the possibility of living life in the Spirit because of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit in baptism. When we surrender to grace and trust in God in all our doings then we enter the flow of the Spirit where love and mercy fill us and flow through us in a trusting generous attitude to the world around us.

Living a spiritual life in Christ means that we are willing to forgive others who hurt us. This possibility comes from the presence of the virtue of mercy in our hearts.

Pope Francis writes in *Misericordiae Vultus*, “He (Jesus) then goes on to tell the parable of the ‘ruthless servant,’ who, called by his master to return a huge amount, begs him on his knees for mercy. His master cancels his debt. But he



then meets a fellow servant who owes him a few cents and who in turn begs on his knees for mercy, but the first servant refuses his request and throws him into jail. When the master hears of the matter, he becomes infuriated and, summoning the first servant back to him, says, "Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (*Mt 18:33*). Jesus concludes, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother (or sister) from your heart" (*Mt 18:35*).

The Pope goes on to say, "This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive!" (No. 9)

To Forgive – A Question of Head and Heart

But even if we want to forgive, some negative feelings of ours might make it hard. Arriving at the feeling of forgiveness may take time but that is O.K. This is where some basic psychology can help us to achieve the virtue of mercy. As Christians we know that Jesus is right in demanding that we forgive. But sometimes while we agree in our head that we should forgive, the feelings of hatred, resentment or hurt in our heart seem to block us. It is good to remember that the head can set a direction but the heart must arrive there at its own pace.

Let's think of a relationship where a person feels very hurt because of the words and actions of another person e.g. if your boss at work criticizes you very strongly in front of others for some failure. You then withdraw, either physically or psychologically – this is a healthy pulling back to assess the situation. At this point the head might insist that you should forgive but the feelings of your heart are blocking that decision.

What is needed here now is self-awareness on three levels. Firstly, name your negative feelings and if possible tell them to someone else e.g. the shame, hurt and anger you feel towards your boss for the way he spoke and the things he said publicly. Secondly, become aware of the echoes of old injuries or traumas connected to this new injury. "When have I felt like this before?" is the key question. Maybe you had a similar feeling when, as a child, your parent gave you a hiding for something that wasn't your fault.

Telling that story or writing it down brings out further memories and you begin

A powerful technique for releasing the old hurt is by repetition. Tell the old story of how your parent gave you an undeserved hiding to a supportive friend, with all the emotional detail, over and over until you are bored with your story. Now that old trauma or old wound loses its power.

The third level of self-awareness then is to acknowledge your own responsibility in the conflict with your boss. You need to admit to the impact of your mistake on your boss or on his business and why he might have some negative feelings towards you. This awareness on three levels now clears the way for your decision to take a risk in order to find reconciliation. You should choose the kind of risk that if your boss doesn't react well you won't feel too upset e.g. you might decide to greet him in a friendly way. The final stage is to actualize your decision. Then, if your greeting is returned, you might decide to offer *kava* and ask for reconciliation. This is a way in which we can be patient and free our heart's feelings to have mercy.

Discovering Mercy Beneath an Accumulation of Negative Feelings

Pope Francis asks us to listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (*Mt 5:7*): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year. (No.9)

Families or married couples often find themselves in a situation where love seems to have been replaced by disappointment, frustration and anger. The psychologist, John Grey, in his book "What you Feel you can Heal," says that mercy and love often get suppressed as time goes on by layers of other feelings. So, for example, a wife might feel anger and blame towards her husband. Beneath the anger is hurt and sadness. The hurt is a cover for fear and insecurity and underneath the fear we hide our guilt and responsibility. At the bottom of these layers of interconnected feelings lie the love, forgiveness, and mercy which can bring the relationship alive again.

So John Grey advises spouses, or even one spouse alone, to write a love letter – but a different kind of love letter. The first paragraph should be devoted completely to getting out the anger and blame without any attempt to make them seem reasonable – just express pure unadulterated feelings in strong language. For example "I feel mad at you when you go out drinking *grog* every night of the weekend."

This usually brings some feelings of hurt and sadness to light, perhaps even



with tears. So, in the second paragraph, the wife writes the sadness and hurt she feels because of the situation e.g. "I feel so lonely and neglected by you when you constantly leave me and the kids for your friends." After some time expressing this the writer goes to level three and writes down the feelings of fear and insecurity that are coming up in paragraph three e.g. "I'm afraid you will leave us for someone else."

Now that these strong feelings have been expressed it is time to take responsibility in paragraph four for your part in the situation you are writing about e.g. "I'm sorry that I nagged you so much when you came home tired from work today." After expressing these four levels of feeling you will begin to feel the emotional connection with your spouse and you will get back in touch with your love, forgiveness and mercy. So in the fifth paragraph the wife might write, "I love you so much and am proud of you as my husband. I want us to be warm and affectionate the way we used to be."

After writing a love letter like that the person will feel much better having clarified and resolved her own feelings and connected with the love that still exists deep down. Now you are gazing at the mercy in your own heart. Now you give such a letter to your spouse (or rebellious adolescent child) to read three or four times through. This personal gift of yours can bring alive again a love that seemed to have died.

If we look again at the case of Raj and his daughter Baibi we can see these layers of feelings in Raj's heart. His loving open and paternal relationship with his daughter was betrayed by her elopement. When she refused to return home to allow her father arrange a wedding he spoke out his great anger and banished his daughter from the family. When I visited the family their sadness was so clear to me. The fear beneath the sadness was the fear of having their good name as a family spoilt forever – the neighbors and relatives would always talk about how the family was shamed by their daughter's elopement. The example of the loving and forgiving father in Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son touched into Raj's sense of responsibility and deep feelings of love which were still there beneath the anger, sadness and fear. So when his daughter appeared again in his home he was able to forgive her and receive her back.

Mercy in the Social Context of Fiji

I have examined the interpersonal context of finding and releasing mercy in the human heart. There is also a social context for our Christian view of humanity. to see its connection with how you are feeling towards your boss. Mercy for us Christians is the key value to be promoted in society. Unfortunately we live in a

social context of globalization which has values opposite to Christianity's. Globalization sees humanity as consisting of two groups – one group consisting of consumers and producer and the other group consisting of poor non-consumers. These latter are excluded as non-persons.

The glitz of having the latest gadgets or wearing the latest fashion is part of the globalization ethos. There is a never-ending search for the new, for more, for better. For globalization there is no point of arrival, no sense of enough, no goal beyond itself – the process just continues like a round-about or merry-go-round. You are someone if you are in the game. You are no one if you are left outside gazing in. The amount of publicity that Fiji media give fashion shows, Hollywood or Bollywood actors and social events nowadays is worrying. We must be aware that these display selfish values to ordinary young people. Most of our young people won't "make" it and will be left outside feeling useless.

Fiji is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society and identity, security and belonging are basic needs of all people here. How do people who are different live together feeling secure in belonging to one society and one country while holding on to their own religion, ethnicity and culture? In this regard it is important to take into account power relations between the different communities. But beyond or beneath the political dynamics of power relations we need mercy to bind all communities together.

An iTaukei priest related to me how, a week after Cyclone Winston, many groups of non-Christian Indo-Fijians stopped in front of the Primary School at Navunibitu. They gave cooked and uncooked food in to the iTaukei cyclone victims even though they did not know them. A Sister in one of our Disaster Response Team meetings appealed to team members not to take rations and psychological support only to iTaukei villages but to remember also the Indo-Fijian families we would pass on the road. This is the color of mercy in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society.

Conclusion

I have tried to show how gazing at mercy in the human heart can help us to find ways to live out in our every-day lives the beatitude "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." The head and heart have a different pace in arriving at mercy and sometimes we have to dig down beneath other feelings to revive mercy in our relationships. If mercy becomes the primary value in our multi-ethnic society then we can refuse to be dazzled and deceived by globalization.



May the mercy of God in Jesus Christ be in all our hearts and at the heart of our society here in Fiji so that we can live in peace and harmony together praising the God of mercy who invites to learn from God.

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NOTES

1. *Mercy doesn't rule out God's justice or judgment. Mt 25:31-46 is clear on that. However the case can be made from Lk. 15:11-32 and Mt 20:1-16 that God's concept of justice and judgment is radically different from ours. Later in this essay Pope Francis reminds us that God's mercy on us depends on us having mercy for one another.*
2. *I understand that there is some discussion and disagreement about the theology of original sin. It is not possible to go into that debate that here. Instead I accept the Catholic position as enunciated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part One, Section Two, Chapter One, Article 1, III, no. 402-409.*

Island Prodigals



Encircling the void in Lk. 15: 11-32 with Albert Wendt

(This paper was presented at the Oceania Biblical Studies
Association at
Piula Theological College, Sept. 2015)

*Rev. Dr. Mosese Mailo is the Principal of Piula
Theological College in Samoa*

Reader context

Oceania is a 'sea of stories'. It expands way beyond the horizons of the 'sea of islands.' I refer to the wealth of stories, legends, myths and traditions of Oceania. Stories drifted from island to island. Islands were connected by stories (of creation, of the *tatau*/tattoo, of *Lata/Rata*, of *Tagaloa/Tagaroa*, of the *ietoga*/fine mat, of *Tonga/Samoa/Fiji* chiefly links etc.) and histories (navigation, colonization and decolonization, rivalry mission societies etc.). Our sea of stories has since been intensifying to embrace the Bible (Oceania Bibles), poetry, novels and biblical hermeneutics produced by islanders themselves. Such expansive literature has a certain amount of influence today in the way islanders do politics, play rugby, make love, worship, paint pictures, and in nurturing our sons and daughters, whether in the islands or in Diaspora. Island novelists, social scientists, dancers, painters and biblical interpreters have a common ground in the way they retell island stories; It is the indication of being islanders, of being colonized and de-colonized, of being re-presented, of resistance, of intellectual and spiritual emancipation, and of complying with the winds of changes, while our tongues never cease to tell and retell our 'sea of stories.'

In modern literature, islanders connect when they read *Call it courage* or *Sons for the return home*; watching *Laughing Samoans* or *Three wise cousins* among many others. This 'sea of stories' provides islanders with the confidence, courage, and liberties to rise and break like ocean waves, our views in/of a changing world around us.

The Bible story (from the lenses of Oceania literature) is now part of the sea of stories, *not the Absolute Story*. The reason is that Bible stories are foreign, from a different world, time and space. But it has been translated or retold in island languages and becomes one of *our stories*. Island Bible readers retell Bible stories *island style* because 'Bible as the *only* story' honestly leaves us with a void, a silent incompleteness in understanding *who we are* as islanders. Today, the 'sea of stories,' produced by island writers, assist us to encircle our search and struggles for some structure of meaning, whether in reading the Bible or any other pieces of literature.

Our task then, as island biblical scholars, is to encircle the void created by reading the Bible as the Absolute Story. How? By retelling biblical stories as our story; by reworking biblical stories with our indigenous references, symbols, values, languages and literature, to reconstitute them as changing but changeless island literary and hermeneutical designs.

***Talalasi* reading**

Talalasi is a Samoan literary device where stories and histories are told and re-told. Its weight in practice rests on the proverbial saying, "*E talalasi Samoa.*" Orators use it to express the legitimacy of many tellings, and their standing on an equal platform of authority during exchange of oratorical speeches. It is a universal phenomenon, as Albert Wendt concedes with reference to literature that ". . . novels are about other novels, stories are about other stories, poems are about other poems. The changes come about in the way you tell them." *Talalasi* simply means *many tellings*. *Talanoa* is the act of telling and sharing stories. *Talalasi* is when the same story is told and re-told in different ways and from varying perspectives. The telling may be influenced by the social, political or economic background of the storyteller, to suit the interests of his respective area or traditional constituency.

The finest obsession of *talalasi* is that *no telling is absolute* while there is a certain amount of competitiveness involved. One telling fills the voids and cracks in the other telling, and orators master the differences. No telling is concluded per se without the others. *Talalasi* is concerned about both story and the ongoing life of the story. It therefore assigns a continuing search and struggle for meaning while it also unsettles dominance and paternalism in the way stories are told, received and interpreted.

Which/Who's telling matters more? Is it the historical fact or the retelling? Is it the *tala* (story) or the *talalasi*? Obviously, Samoan orators and storytellers believe that historical facts or data cannot be told without a certain element of narrativity. Therefore the *talalasi* (retelling or many tellings) matters more than the *tala* (actual happening/original story) because the ongoing life of the story depends on the retelling. Fisch contends, that the retelling includes "... the potentiality for change inherent in the process of recapitulation." (Fisch: 1998, 4). *Talalasi* therefore is the experiencing afresh of an historical experience (by the new generation) in the name of relevance, and is therefore a method of reading.

i. *Talalasi* reading is biblical

The Hebrew Bible is full of telling and retelling of stories. The well known Documentary hypothesis on different Sources that constitute the five books of Moses speaks for the multiplicity of tellings (sources) that were later blended to form up a single story (Pentateuch). As a result, we have two tellings of the creation of man/woman or humanity in Genesis 1: 27-28 and 2: 18, 21-22. The Exodus is supposed to be an historical event, but readers were mandated with the task of retelling the experience of Exodus to the children and grandchildren of Israel as in Exodus 10:2 and 13:8. Things happened in the history of Israel, in order to be told and retold.

The early Christian Church provides us with four gospels, which are merely four tellings of the same Jesus story. They do not distort the historical/actual story, but give meaning to it according to the interests and needs of the dissimilar contexts and reading situations of the early Church. We therefore learn from the Bible, that retelling or *talalasi* achieves two roles concurrently; one is the appreciation of the fundamental human need for originality, and the other is the resemblance/same theme or storyline for a constancy of meaning. Bible writers were champions of such enterprise.

ii. *Talalasi*: Novels and Biblical narratives

This is no place for a full analysis on the impact of biblical narratives on novels. However, it is worth noting the powerful presence of the Bible narratives and themes on the English and American novel genres from Bunyan to Hardy and Melville. According to Fisch, the biblical influence is manifested in three ways, "... first, as authorizing the moral code by which the characters are perceived and judged; second, as undergirding the plot structure; and third, as the model for a particular kind of narrative realism" (Fisch: 1998, 8). Fisch is quite correct when he boldly states that "The novel was... the literary instrument of the new Bible-reading, Protestant middle class" (Fisch: 1998, 9).



The impact of the Bible is still reflected in the current novels. While the Bible reflects the voice of the common man against the established Judaism and Roman formal religions during the early Church, the novel is the voice of the common man as against the elevated and hierarchical voices heard in the romance and the epic (Fisch: 1998, 9). In other novels (and I'm sure it's the same with island novels), the moral code, plot structures and narrative realism of biblical narratives are clearly in attendance in some way.

Wendt's *Sons for the Return Home* echoes the biblical story of Luke 15: 11-32, with the author's exceptional creativity. Not only in the most crucial components of the biblical story as this paper is going to expose, but the author himself declares that in the early years in Samoa, his reading was confined to the Bible (Sharrad: 2003, 8). He also penned other literary stuff using biblical symbols like "The Second Coming," and "A Second Christ," although he rejects the Church (Sharrad: 2003, 44). Most literary critics of Wendt's novel may have overlooked or downplayed the Bible's influence on this masterpiece. For this paper, *Sons for the return home* is the most ample commentary on Luke 15: 11-35 ever written from a contemporary island point of view.

Sons for the Return Home: Experience of an island prodigal

The experience of 'leaving and returning home' is universal. The Prodigal Son in Luke 15: 11-32 is the most popular, and therefore no need to repeat it here. It is the iconic Jewish story of leaving and returning home in the context of the Roman Empire. It represents the Bible and its Greco-Roman background. It is well commented upon by biblical scholars from a variety of perspectives in both the Christian West and the non-Christian worlds. Sugirtharajah's appropriation reflects what happens when the prodigal "... travels outside its natural Christian habitat and falls into the hands of interpreters—especially expositors who belong to other religious traditions and writers of secular fictions" (Sugirtharajah's: 2003, 37-50).

Wendt's *Sons for the return home* is chosen based on its unique perception of the theme 'leaving and returning home,' island style. The book (hereafter referred to as *Sons*) became a big screen movie for its recognition. It is a novel that indirectly reflects the experience of the writer himself. Albert Wendt was a Samoan born author. He became a member of an island immigrant colonial minority to New Zealand in the late 1950's.

He moved back to the islands, and the novel was written in Samoa in 1969-1971, while his memories of New Zealand were still fresh and vivid. *Sons* is a straightforward story, written in a form that is not of mainstream standardized prose. It is therefore the first island postcolonial novel. When the book came out in 1973, it invited a mixture of criticisms from New Zealanders, mainstream literary critics, as well as from Oceania politicians and Church leaders due to its prose and especially its parading sexuality (Sharrad: 2003, 39-57). Fiji parliament denounced it as pornography, while Samoans were outraged for its filthy language and Samoa being shown in a bad light to the outside world. But *Sons* is a Pacific islander's genius retelling, from island perspective, of the richness and complexity of the theme 'leaving and returning home.'

Nevertheless, these two stories (biblical prodigal and Wendt's *Sons*) represent the reality of our changing world and a changing Oceania. What I intend to do here is to expose that *Sons* is a retelling of the Lukan story from an islander of the 1970's point of view, while it is still relevant for today's islanders in the Diaspora. Provided below is a brief summary of *Sons* plot for the purpose of this paper, taken from Paul Sharad.

Samoan family seeks wealth and education in New Zealand, land of material plenty but suspect for its secular values and the seductiveness of the palagi/pakeha way of life. Father finds a job in a factory and becomes a deacon in the local Samoan Church, while mother holds the family together around the home. Youngest son is groomed as the one most likely to succeed: he is a skilled rugby player and is academically gifted (contrary to white expectations of Islanders). We meet him at university in the first chapter, where he is accosted in the cafeteria by a white girl trying to be friendly. She persists in the face of his taciturn reserve, and they become lovers.

There carefree romance is offset by the attitudes of both partners' families: by white prejudice among her circle of friends and former lovers; by the self-protective circle of the Samoan community and by the shared realization of the Maori history of dispossession. The girl discovers she is pregnant, makes her peace with her father (who, while a superficially typical pakeha settler-capitalist, has himself left the family farm and forsaken a Maori lover because of family prejudice) and goes to her boyfriend's mother for support. Ironically, she looks up to the Samoan woman as a warm, more forceful, presence than her own neurotic mother palely loitering among her cultivated flower garden. But her boy's mother is horrified that she will be unlikely to have her boy as a success-story exhibit to take home and that she will be cursed with 'half-caste' grandchildren.

The pregnant girl does not want her boyfriend to feel pressured into a wedding (her own birth having been the reason for her parents' less-than-ideal marriage), so she travels to Sydney and has an abortion.

This she comes to regret, and she moves on to London to 'sort herself out'. Her boyfriend still loves her but is hurt by her decision. His father, already disappointed that his son will not follow his grandfather as a healer (the boy has dropped medicine to do a degree in history), can offer little comfort. In despair at losing the girl, the son takes it out on her former lover (a typical upper-class white racist) by beating him up, and returns with the family to the long dreamed of and highly romanticized Samoa.

All along, he has sought or felt driven to stand aside from the crowd, and in the collective, parochially complacent, village world the son feels even more alienated. He does find his grandfather's grave, a lone circle of stones in the bush, and achieves some sense of connection with tradition and with his father as they recover the story of this feared pagan isolate who had 'removed the centre of his circle' by killing his beloved wife, performing an abortion on her in suspicion of her being unfaithful.

After a fairly sordid time in the more urbanized Apia, the youth resolves to return to New Zealand. His mother, glorying in the modern palagi amenities brought back from the years away, triumphantly tells her prized son that he cannot go back to his girlfriend. Realizing that she has persuaded the girl to have the abortion, he ritually slaps her in renunciation of his connection and we see him finally suspended between the two countries, flying back to Wellington.

Wendt retells Luke's prodigal into the concrete life of islanders in the 1970's, and the driving force of the commonwealth literature of the 60s and 70s fight for decolonization (Ashcroft: 1981, 26-27; Sharrad: 2003, 39-57). The prodigal is a complex phenomenon in *Sons*. It is about islanders struggling to find a place for themselves in the colonial and postcolonial contexts of Samoa and New Zealand. *Sons* is a realistic retelling of the biblical narrative, and Wendt left no stone unturned in the most gripping parts of the Lukan story.

Wendt trails the plot structure of Lk. 15: 11-32, while his originality is reflected in the voices or voicelessness of island characters. Therefore, the moral code, plot structure and narrative realism of the biblical story are maintained, while Wendt's retelling is very much more at home (Oceania) than the Western interpretations of Luke 15: 11-32.

1. **Island Prodigals: families, sons and daughters**

There are two lines of interpreting the prodigal in the novel. First is an island immigrant family, a prodigal from the perspective of the village and island protocols. The family's decision to leave their *home (is)land* and move to New Zealand resembles the decision of the younger son in Lk. 15. In island life, decision on every member of the family belongs to the parents/family and not a young son. Wendt retells/replaces the individualistic view of the biblical prodigal with an island perception of an immigrant family, migrating to distant land in the early seventies for greener pastures.

Secondly, *Sons* went further to create a prodigal son within the Samoan immigrant/prodigal family to re-establish the biblical plot structure with the logic of individualism. The writer himself (Wendt) was a son of the immigrant colonial minority in New Zealand. He experienced how immigrant families faced unexpected problems when their children grew up and were instantly caught between two different cultures in their new home. This is a unique retelling of the biblical plot structure where a prodigal family (island perspective) produces prodigal sons as a result of their decisions to leave the islands and move to distant lands. It is one of *Sons'* greatest contributions to the retelling of Lk. 15. Realistically, island young people who migrated to New Zealand in the 70's with their families may not have a say in decision making, which means they migrated against their will.

The pakeha/palagi family in *Sons* is originally from England, the Centre of Empire that turned New Zealand into a colonial/imperial space in the 18th century. Wendt may have had in mind the English prodigals of that time who left the Centre of Empire for distant places (empire building process), with reference to the English literature of Jane Austen and her companions. Cleverly juxtaposed in the plot structure, two families (Samoan and English) turned out to be both immigrant prodigals in New Zealand, the land of (Maui) the indigenous Maori. The two young lovers (Samoan son and English daughter) became prodigals who went back to their respective roots (London and Samoa) at the end of the story.

Wendt's idea of immigrant families enriches the biblical story. It reached out to several realities of island migration and colonial movements that created prodigals in both the Empire and the islands. Colonialism, as identified by most of



Wendt's literary critics, was at the backdrop of global and local movements, of discovery and re-discovery, of prodigal sons and daughters, migration and change, discrimination and misunderstandings that re-created both the Empire and the islands in the early nineteenth century. The relationship of the two lovers (Samoan son and English daughter) in the novel recapitulated very wisely the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized, and how they both learned and were enriched by/from one another.

The purpose of most islanders who migrated to the distant land, New Zealand in the 60's and 70's, was to come back to the home (is)land, one day, with riches. It is a bare consequence of colonialism, mimicry and desire for economic equality. On the other hand, the purpose of English families who followed the footsteps of Empire was to dig for riches in the treasure islands and other colonial spaces. New Zealand was therefore not viewed as a permanent home for both prodigal families and their prodigal sons and daughters. Rather, a land of milk, money and honey, and islanders (the older generation) like the protagonist's parents, only wanted to acquire wealth and as benefactors of the colonizers education for their sons. This is more concrete and appealing to Oceania, to both critique and appreciate the benefits of colonization.

2. The distant land

The name of the distant land in the biblical story is never mentioned. It is only referred to as a distant land, where the son squandered his property in dissolute living (Lk. 15: 13). If historical criticism is accurate, then it has to be either a country under colonial rule of the Roman Empire, or the center of Empire itself. The distant country was struck by a famine, and the son began to be in need. No one gave him anything. The biblical author represents the distant land as hostile, to be in complete contrast to home (Israel). To be struck by a famine indicates the language of curse as a consequence of sinfulness. Unfortunately, the distant land is barely silenced and represented as the 'other' in the biblical story.

The foreign land in Wendt's story is New Zealand. It is a dream land for islanders of the 60's and 70's Oceania. Wendt exposed the shortcomings of the dream land in a way that was common to the commonwealth and postcolonial writers of the time. *Sons* is set in the context of New Zealand which was "founded on a black-white dichotomy, exposing racist and colonialist discriminations and charting the main character's path towards iconoclastic self-possession in a complex and conflictual world" (Sharrad: 2003, 43-44). The distant land (New Zealand) is a beautiful but conflicted colonial space that hosted

both the colonizer (English family of the girlfriend) and the colonized (Maoris and Islanders) including the protagonist's immigrant family. The distant land is set up in the novel as a land of opportunities for both colonizer and colonized. This is the representation of New Zealand in the islands.

But that is not all to Wendt's observation of places. He smartly used the perceptions of the indigenous Maori to unveil the injustices of colonization and the dispossession of the Maoris in their own backyard by the *pakeha*. There is more to the distant land than what is indicated in the Lukan prodigal. The overt sexuality in the novel may be taken as Wendt's exposition of the unexplained 'dissolute living' in the Lukan story (Lk. 15: 13). Sex is liberated into a form of self-expression and spontaneity as in the storyteller's generation of the 70's New Zealand, a place of immoral sexual values—homosexuality, gang rape, and premarital licentiousness. This is obviously written from the viewpoint of Samoan parents and churchgoing islanders, permeated by Victorian missionaries in the South Seas.

However, the view of the distant land in *Sons* is much more realistic than the Lukan representation. The author of Luke seemed to distinguish between the distant land (immorality) and Israel (purity) as the perfect place. I will return to this later, but it is important to note how Wendt changed that perspective in the novel. He provides a more balanced view of places, where both islands and New Zealand have their advantages and disadvantages for young people.

3. Island pigs vs. biblical pigs

The pigs in the Lukan story symbolize impurity and contamination. The protagonist turned out to be a servant of impurity as a consequence of spending lavishly. From a Jewish perspective, he became impure by feeding the pigs. But it was by feeding the impure animals that a certain human being came to his senses and thought of doing the right thing.

Sons portrayal of pigs is quite interesting. Instead of representing them in a more sophisticated way, as a symbol of island economic prosperity, they (pigs) became a diehard memory for island kids. The killing of a pig in Samoa was the only event stored up in the memory of the island prodigal son (in New Zealand) for many years, and he worked to perfect that memory "until every detail was fixed and final" (Wendt: 1973, 78). The killing of the pig in Samoa became a memory because of its violent performance. He was forced to be part of the ritual by his uncle, but eventually liked it later. It is a violent image of island



culture, while it also presents an ambivalent (for a young kid) treatment of their pet animals. That pig was killed and roasted for the last feast they had in the island with their extended family before leaving for New Zealand the next day.

The next time the memory of killing the pig reappeared to the island prodigal son (in New Zealand) is significant. Just before the weekend when the Samoan family would return to the islands, the prodigal son beat up a palagi/pakeha guy in the pub toilets. It was revenge, for that was the white guy who humiliated the island prodigal in front of his girlfriend. While he was washing the blood off his clothes and from his bruised knuckles, he suddenly became aware of his reflection in the mirror above the sink. In Wendt's words, "As he gazed into his face, into the staring eyes, he remembered how, as a child in Samoa, he had watched and then participated in the killing of that boar. It had been a terrifying beautiful ritual" (Wendt: 1973, 167). What a way to conclude with the kid's experience of killing island pigs. While the biblical pigs teach humans to come to their senses, island pigs teach island boys to become men, violent men. Violence is universal. The mother of the island prodigal son's representation of the islands as a purity and perfect place was just a representation. There is violence in the islands.

4. The Return

'Return' in *Sons* is an exceptional exposition of the Lukan return. Wendt offered the return of two prodigals, the island son and the English daughter. The son returned with his family to the islands with wealth from New Zealand. The pakeha/palagi girl returned to London, torn apart (inwardly) after her abortion in Sydney. It indicates the complexity of a dream 'return' from Wendt's view. This is relevant especially for the younger generation of islanders in the Diaspora.

The 'return' is one of the central themes of the Lukan story. However, Western commentators of Luke 15 failed to see the complexity of the son's return in the light of the Returnees of the post-exilic era (That may be another article). But what I am saying here is that the idea of a 'return' is universal with its plethora of motives and complexities. The Return of the Samoan family was a dream come true to the parents, and not to their son. The younger generation of islanders in New Zealand and beyond faced the same crisis. Sometimes, they are expected to return against their will. Some of them, like Wendt's prodigal, were expecting the return as a run away from his personal struggles and oblivions. He may have expected that they were returning to an 'island in the sun,' instead, returned to 'island without a sun.' The return to the islands according to *Sons* is not so much of a cultural miss or beloved country. It is rather an economic driven optimism for the parents and a trouble-free world for the son. It is not even about "coming to his senses" as in the Lukan story.

5. Home: What is home?

The image of Samoa (Home) to the younger son in New Zealand was only seen through his mother's memories and representations. The protagonist left Samoa as a young kid, and he only remembered how he participated in the slaughtering of a pig as mentioned above. Home in *Sons* is a complicated search (opposite of 'home' as portrayed in the Lukan story) and it is Wendt's most valuable contribution to island postcolonial thinking. It signifies paradox and contradiction as indicated in the son's or the protagonist's search for a homeland. It is developed right from the beginning of the novel, and came to its conclusions in the final lines.

In the first few chapters, *silence* is a recurrent word and it is variously "... hostile, sympathetic, critical, awkward, fragile and healing" (Sharrad 2003, 50). This silence helps develop the two vital elements in *Sons*, "the politics of self-transformation" and the "philosophy of possibility" (Ashcroft 1981, 24). *Silence* indicates the failure of language to express the deep seated contradictions in the heart of the son's search, and Ashcroft rightly articulates, "The discovery of silence as the ultimate direction of language ... turns the boundaries of time and space inside out. The circle of the self becomes boundless because it becomes the circumference of that silence" (Ashcroft 1981, 24). While *silence* becomes a tool of self-transformation, the place of 'home' in such search for meaning becomes fluid and opens up new beginnings, beyond island horizons. The prodigal's return with his parents to the dream home (is)land, Samoa, is such an ironical connection to his roots. He observed how his own grandfather (who committed suicide) conducted an abortion and killed his wife, thus breaking his own family lines, just like the English girlfriend who opted for abortion in Sydney.

Samoa was no longer his dream home (is)land. Island life is no longer paradise. There is no island homecoming. Where is the true home (is)land? To the Jewish writer of Luke 15: 11-32, homeland is where security and plentifulness is, the Promised Land. Everyone else is the 'other.' To the prodigal in *Sons*, he remains a permanent outsider until the end. Writing out of misery, Wendt seems to declare that 'he cannot find the home (is)land that he cannot cease to yearn for except as an Oceania that is succumbing to the rot of colonialism and capitalist greed.' However, the islander prodigal in *Sons* maintained his self-respect, integrity, and confidence in his decisions. He did not want to be turned into a domesticated Islander. At the end of the novel, the Islander prodigal was on the plane back to New Zealand, the colonial space. While he was suspended on air, he thought;

He didn't know why he was going back (NZ), but even that didn't seem important any longer. . .

He had nothing to regret, nothing to look forward to.

All was well

He was alive; at a new beginning. He was free of his dead. . .

Talalasi encircles voids of who we are in biblical stories

We have tried to see the biblical prodigal in the sea of stories and what it could offer to the modern Oceania reader. Exemplifying the nature of the ocean, *talalasi* is fluid, enriching and give spaces for change and progress. *Talalasi* exposes injustices of colonial racism and misguided notions of island paradise in the 'sea of stories.' It allows balance and fairness in terms of representation and self determination.

Sons a novel from a son of Oceania encircle the void of who we are as island sons and daughters in Luke's Prodigal Son. They retell the biblical worldview of leaving and returning home in a more realistic fashion to islanders of today and tomorrow. After all, to be excluded or to be forced into a story without our own telling and experiences is itself an indication of a void to be encircled. It is relevant to turn to our Oceania retellings to fill such emptiness in our continuing search and struggle for new beginnings. Island is and is not always home(is)land. The idea of Home today is fluid and complex. Island as home(is)land is where we begin anew.

Ua lava na tala, e talalasi Samoa!!!

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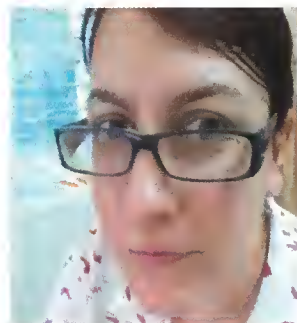
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NOTES

1. Juniper Ellis, "The techniques of storytelling," *An interview with Albert Wendt* in <http://www.ariel.ucalgary.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/3046/2991>
2. *Sons for the return home* is rated as the first novel ever written by a Samoan (Pacific?) writer in the English language. It is also available as a film, but this article relies mostly on the book
3. These points can be detected from 'Towards a new Oceania', *MANA Review*, 1:1 (1976) 49-60 and 'In a stone castle in the South Seas', *MANA Review* 1:2 (1976), 27-29



Literary Seduction: God as Feminized Other in Job



Kathryn Tuilaucala Imray, PhD, is from Perth, Western Australia. Her research interests include love and death in the ancient Near East, subversive humour, and existential counselling and creative therapies. Kathryn is currently lecturer in Hebrew Bible at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji.

Abstract: Readers of Job are seduced by an often hidden narrator into privileging the character Job's experience and language. A clear narrative voice in Job 1-2 establishes Job as innocent victim, while in the poetic dialogues the narrative voice "retreats," creating the illusion of unmediated dialogue. Set in opposition to the privileged experience and language of Job is the God character, who is feminized through both birthing imagery and alignment with chaos. While God is imaged as mother elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, only in Job is God mother to chaos. The narrator inverts the typical biblical relationship between chaos and God and thereby creates a God character who occupies a space outside of the andocentric order. This feminist narrative criticism of the Book of Job therefore argues that the book's preservation of a patriarchal understanding of suffering leads to the vilification of God according to gender categories.

Keywords: Job, Feminist, Womb, Chaos, Monster

It has long been noted that the Book of Job is an andocentric text.¹ Feminist readings of Job have focused on the figure of Job's wife, "the satan's handmaid," but Job's daughters, too, are victims of the patriarchal matrix of the book, as then must be his sons, and the young man Elihu.² The Book of Job, written as it seems to be from the perspective of a male of a certain class and wealth, privileges the experience and language of that gender, class, and wealth. Job is a rich man's rich man, and Job's suffering is potentially the suffering of any rich man of

status.³ Naturally, in a book where the sufferings of a rich man of status are valorized, any character who stands in opposition to the values of the rich man of status becomes questionable. Job's wife stands in opposition to her husband, as do the friends of Job, and Elihu. Job's wife, the friends, and Elihu are all therefore painted in the text as being of questionable wisdom. The wisdom of the God character, standing as it does in opposition to the values of Job, is also brought into question.

This article argues that God too is a victim of the patriarchal matrix of the Book of Job. With God's interests set against those of Job, God, like the friends, Job's wife, and Elihu, falls victim to the andocentric ideology of the text. The God character takes up the position of a "bad" woman, given a womb that births chaos into the world. This is particularly evident when passages from the Yhwh speeches of Job 38-41 are compared against the Hymn to Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Against this backdrop of a feminized God, the violence of God against Job, so prevalent in Job's speeches, can be seen to echo the violence of certain ancient Near Eastern goddesses against humanity.

All Eyes Look to Job

Job is not only the character whose experience drives the book's plot, he is also the character which readers are positioned to identify as the book's primary character. Manipulations by the narrator ensure that Job's experience and statements about his experience are privileged over any other character's. In the narrative prologue of the book, the narrator establishes Job as the central figure of the story, and as one who tells the truth. Despite the oft-given division of the book into narrative framework and poetic speech cycles, moreover, the narrator is still present even in the speech cycles, and consequently the agenda of the narrator, established in the narrative prologue, extends into the speech cycles.⁴ The constant presence of the narrator suggests that the agenda established in the prologue continues into the speech cycles, including into the Yhwh speeches.

It is possible to establish Job's centrality through narrative epistemology, by asking, how do we know that Job is blameless and upright? Despite narrators being characters within the text, with gender and an agenda, readers usually view them as truth-telling characters.⁵ The status readers accord the narrator as truth-teller secures Job's position as blameless and upright. The narrator has a clear voice in the framing story of Job 1-2 and 42:7-17. This narrator states that Job is blameless and upright (תם וישר), he fears God, turns away from evil (יירא אלהים וסרמרע) and is the richest man in the east (Job 1:1, 3). When God also calls Job blameless and upright, God fearing and turning from evil, repeating the narrator's description of Job, the authority readers would attribute to God has been co-opted by the narrator to position Job as blameless and upright.⁶ Job has now become unquestionably blameless and upright, and would always, the reader might assume,



tell the truth. The truth value of the statements and activities of Job, God, and the narrator therefore become unquestionable with this one repeated description. Everything they do or say are authentic statements and actions of those characters. Finally, when the God character refers in the epilogue to Job as “my servant” (42:7, 8), this recalls God’s description of Job as “my servant” in the prologue (1:8; 2:3), and as one who is “blameless and upright.” When God says, therefore, that “my servant Job” has “spoken rightly of me” (42:7), this is a statement of unquestionable truth-value, which itself functions to establish Job’s voice as the most important voice in the book. All fingers point at the truth value of Job’s experience and statements.

The oft-given division of the book into narrative framework and poetic dialogues suggests that there is nothing of the narrative in the dialogues. Throughout the dialogues, however, there are regular narrative insertions, usually the formulaic “and N answered and he said” (וַיַּעַן . . . וַיֹּאמֶר).⁷ These narrative insertions create a link to the prologue, its characterization, and its ideology. Despite the appearance of unfiltered dialogue, then, the narrator is ever-present, shaping the experience of each reader, mediating the voices of each character.⁸

The consequence of the inescapable narrator is that the ideal reader is positioned so that they cannot but privilege Job’s experience and language.⁹ The God character then becomes a manipulable plot device, functioning to progress the story of Job’s suffering. Job suffers because God made it so, and in order to secure an ongoing, open-ended story of privileged suffering, the God character’s response is one which must be considered inadequate. Part of the positioning by which the God-character’s response is rendered inadequate involves the feminization of God.

God the Woman

Among the many things God is in the Book of Job, creator, oppressor, murderer, peeping tom,¹⁰ God is also a woman, insofar as God possesses a womb, and God is a mother. Where God is a mother elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, God is typically mother to the Israelites.¹¹ In Job, however, God is mother to chaos and, beyond this, seems to care for chaos as a mother might her child.

In Job 38:8 God is imaged as possessing a womb (רחם).¹²

Who shut up the sea with doors when it broke forth from the womb?

Also in Job 38:29:

Has the rain a father? Or who begot the drops of dew? Out of whose womb (בטן) came the ice? And the hoary frost of heaven, who has given it birth? (38:28-29)

38:8 is an important verse I will return to below, suffice it to say here that the sea, the chaos waters, break out of a womb (רחם). The absence of a possessive pronoun might make it difficult to assign ownership of the womb, but it is most likely, particularly in light of its context within Job 38, that the womb belongs to God.

Job 38 presents a series of questions designed to illustrate Job's lack of understanding and power.¹³ Within this series of questions illustrating Job's uselessness and God's wondrous capabilities falls 38:28-29, a short passage posing some problems for interpreters who do not wish to admit God's feminization in the Yhwh speeches. Gregory Vall summarizes possible responses to the questions in 38:28-29:

Alonso Schökel notes that the questions "in principle" admit of two different sets of responses. The first set of responses would run as follows: "No, the rain has no father. No one begot the dew drops. The ice came forth from no one's womb. And no one gave birth to the rime of the sky." And the second set: "Yes, the rain has a father, God. The dew drops were begotten by God. The ice came forth from God's womb. And God gave birth to the rime of the sky . . . Indeed, it should be noted that the second set of responses would imply both a certain paternity (v. 28) and a certain maternity (v. 29) on God's part. And there's the rub. Does the text invite us to compare God's creation of the rain, dew, ice, and frost with human procreation, or does it dissuade us from just such a comparison?"¹⁴

Vall surveys the commentators who favor the first response and those who favor the second, and himself concludes, in line with Fox, Hartley, and Alter, that "the three *who* questions in our text should be answered as follows: 'No one begot the dew drops. The ice came forth from no one's womb. No one gave birth to the rime.'"¹⁵

The majority of commentators who are willing to commit to an unequivocal response however according to Vall do find in favor of the second response, that "God does," but, he notes, they are quick to explain that the language is metaphorical.¹⁶ In the language adopted by Vall, the "risk" attached to responding "God does" to these questions arises particularly in the second set of images. In the first set the images are masculine and would result in speaking of God as "begetting" and being a father. In the second set the images are feminine and would result in God having a womb, and giving birth.¹⁷ "To call Yahweh 'the father of the rain' is one thing," Vall writes; "to speak of him begetting drops of dew or to speak of ice issuing from his womb is quite another."¹⁸



Several commentators take the female procreative imagery seriously, including John C. L. Gibson, Phyllis Tribble, and Lillian Klein. Gibson claims that most commentators would prefer to avoid the notion that God is father or mother, but that “the author of the Book of Job is a poet, and here he prefers risky language to safe theology if it will help get his audience thinking.”¹⁹ Tribble argues that the poetry “balances parental images,” and asks questions to which the answer is both yes, and no.

The questions are ironic; their purpose is to teach Job the transcendence of Yahweh. Thus, no human images, not even parental ones, can encompass divine creativity. No, the rain does not have a father; no male has sired the drops of dew. Rain and dew come only from God. No, the ice does not come forth from a woman’s womb; no female has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven. Ice and hoarfrost come only from God. Yet this irony has a double edge. Human images, especially parental ones, do suggest the activity of the divine. Yes, the rain does have a father; he has sired the drops of dew. God is this father. Yes, the ice does come forth from a woman’s womb; a female has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven (cf. Job 38:8). God is this mother.²⁰

Klein writes of God’s figurative “cosmic womb,” claiming that in 38:8, 29, “YHWH simultaneously claims a womb and images the womb as the source of death.”²¹ Gibson, Tribble, and Klein therefore accept a metaphorical nature for the images, but they seem not, as other commentators do, to suggest that these are “just” metaphors. Rather, for them there is something of substance in the metaphor of the en-wombed God.

In addition to God possessing a womb in these passages, God also is shown to be a birthgiver, and a nurturer (38: 8-11). As discussed above, God gives birth to ice in 38:29, and in 38:8 God gives birth to the sea (יָם), a symbol of chaos throughout the ancient Near East. Beyond birthing it, moreover, God cares for chaos as a mother would an infant.

In the Hebrew Bible and throughout the ancient Near East, creation sometimes arises out of the defeat or taming of chaos,²² and Gray is just one commentator among many who identifies the ancient Near Eastern Chaoscampf myth as the source for 38:8.²³ Job’s Chaoscampf motif is similar to the traditional Chaoscampf motif in that God bars in the sea in with doors. In the second Yhwh speech, though, God describes Behemoth and Leviathan, both generally accepted as figures of chaos analogous with the sea, and throughout the description of Behemoth and Leviathan, Yhwh boasts of their strength, their ferocity, and their inability to be contained by any person. However, God seems to suggest the Leviathan has entered into a covenant with God (40:28), and these untamed, terrify

-ing forces are the playful (40:29) servants of God.²⁴ Scholars emphasize God's control of chaos in these images and seem to take less heed of where the chaos comes from. In other ancient Near Eastern mythologies, chaos is present before creation, something which has no obvious provenance. In Job, however, before taming chaos (if that is what God does), God first makes (עשה) chaos (40:15).²⁵ This image is also found in Ps 104:26, where God also creates (יצר) Leviathan to play (שחק) in the sea. In the Book of Job, however, beyond simply creating chaos, God gives birth to chaos. The chaos waters "gush" from God's womb like amniotic fluid. Having birthed chaos into creation, God cares for chaos as a mother would her baby, swaddling it and placing it in a playpen.²⁷ When the baby chaos monster grows to become the figures of Behemoth and Leviathan, God evidences parental pride.

Despite resistance to the idea, then, the God in Job, particularly as presented in the Yhwh speeches, possesses female attributes. The womb which brings forth ice in 38:29 is the same womb which brings forth the chaos waters in 39:8. Gray is at a loss with regard to the origins of the imagery in 38:8b-11,²⁸ but there is a clear parallel to this part of the Yhwh speeches, and it lies within the wisdom books themselves, in the Hymn to Wisdom in Proverbs 8.

The Yhwh Speeches and Proverbs

The Yhwh speeches of Job seem to be a parody of the sentiments of the Hymn to Wisdom in Prov. 8:22-36. Rather than God begetting and delighting in the ordering force of wisdom as in Proverbs 8, God in Job gives birth to and delights in the disordering force of chaos.

In Proverbs, the creation of Wisdom is God's first act.²⁹ Wisdom certainly witnesses the creation of the world (Prov. 8:27-29), but there is some question whether she has a hand in it also (8:30). Wisdom was throughout the creative process beside God as an אמן, usually taken to mean either an artisan or a child.³⁰ The verb קנה, beget, in Prov. 8:22, and that Wisdom in this passage "plays" before God (משחקת לפניו; Prov. 8:30), suggests that Wisdom is in this passage an infant.³¹ The passage seems to describe not Wisdom's active role in creation, but rather suggests that creation is ordered or systematized, for the concept of system or order itself was the first creation of God. Chaos (ים and חס) in the hymn is constrained by law and decree (פק and פי; Prov. 8:29).³²

While chaos in Job is not the first of creation, chaos is birthed by God. Just as Wisdom is placed before God, like an infant playing before a parent, so too is chaos placed before God, like an infant. In Proverbs 8, God begets Wisdom, a force for order, while in the Yhwh speeches, God gives birth to chaos, a force of disorder. One could well argue that the masculine begetting in Proverbs leads to order whereas the feminine birthing in Job leads to disorder.



Proverbs is also illustrative with regard to the relationship between women and chaos. The binary worldview exhibited in Proverbs holds straight apart from crooked, righteous apart from wicked, light from dark, life from death, male from female, and order from chaos. An andocentric social model such as this therefore has men and male interests at the center of the social order, with women cast out of the center. Further, the status quo needs to be maintained to ensure the continuation of the andocentric structures that benefit men.³³ Good women, such as the good wife in Proverbs 1-9, maintain order and thereby uphold andocentric interests, while bad women upset the order and potentially damage those interests. The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 famously is a figure of social disorder and death. "As the embodiment of every broken boundary, the Strange Woman figures chaos, the abyss itself."³⁴

In the andocentric Book of Job, the narrator identifies God with women. The narrator does this through giving God a womb and aligning God with chaos. God in the Book of Job is in the same position as the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1-9, on the outside of the andocentric order, and threatening it. Ushering chaos into the world through the womb, God in effect becomes an ultimate bad girl.

Job's God Among the Goddesses

It might be that the feminization of God in Job encompasses not just the birthing, nursing, and chaos imagery, but also the violence of God against people of which Job so frequently speaks.³⁵ There are a number of ancient Near Eastern goddesses who, like Job's God, are both violent and either procreative or sexually active, among them Asherah, Anat, Sekhmet, Tiamat, and Inanna-Ishtar.

The Ugaritic Anat, for instance, chops heads and hands off human men, and wades up to her thighs in blood.³⁶ Anat is considered to be "a thoroughly ambiguous figure: at once the giver and life and purveyor of death, a mediator between fertility and mortality."³⁷ Asherah, with whom a number of ancient Near Eastern texts confuse Anat, is the Canaanite consort of the god El, and was also worshiped throughout ancient Israel in conjunction with El/Yhwh.³⁸ Often described as a fertility goddess, Asherah nonetheless also curses humans.³⁹ The Egyptian Goddess (Hathor-)Sekhmet, also called the Eye of Ra, is a solar goddess with the body of a woman and the head of a cat. In a well known myth, Sekhmet massacres humanity until she is distracted with blood-colored beer.⁴⁰ The Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat is also a mother who destroys her children, and produces "nightmare warriors" who are "chaos incarnate."⁴¹ Finally, Inanna-Ishtar "frequently acts in ways that disrupt the social order. She can be wild and savage, excessive in her sexuality and love of war."⁴² She is mad, androgynous, and destructive.⁴³

A feminized God in the Yhwh speeches is in keeping with these figures from

ancient Near Eastern mythology. Like Anat, Asherah, Sekhmet, Tiamat, and Inanna-Ishtar, God is in several passages of the female persuasion, and like Anat, Asherah, Sekhmet, Tiamat, and Inanna-Ishtar, God can be death and suffering for her creations.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The Book of Job is a patriarchal text representing the values of men of wealth and status. Playing on readerly expectation that narrators are truth-tellers, readers are seduced into privileging the character Job's experience and language. It seems that God, by God's own admission, often stands opposed to the interests of the privileged male. The narrator inverts the typical biblical relationship between chaos and God and thereby creates a God character who occupies the position usually taken up not just by women, but by women who actively pursue the destruction of male interests, and men. The image of a divine destructive female is not unknown in ancient Near Eastern mythology, and the enwombed, chaos-birthing, and murderous God of Job is at home amongst such goddesses as Inanna-Ishtar, Anat, Tiamat, Asherah, and Sekhmet. One might speak of Job's God as one who not only gives birth to chaos and monsters but who ultimately is a monstrous figure of chaos herself.⁴⁵

NOTES

¹ Lilian R. Klein, "Job and the Womb: Text about Men; Subtext about Women," in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 186-200, presents a neat assessment of the role of women in the text. David J.A. Clines, "Why is There a Book of Job and What Does it Do to You if You Read it?" in W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *Book of Job* (Louvain: Leuven University Press; Peeters, 1994), pp. 1-20) also discusses the patriarchal nature of the text.

² The term "patriarchal matrix" is borrowed from Clines ("Why is there a Book of Job?" p. 7). See F. Rachel Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job," *BibInt* 14/3 (2006), pp. 209-258 (210-215), for a summary of opinions on the position and role of Job's wife in the text. Job's daughters in the prologue, listed as his property, are obviously victims. Job's daughters of the epilogue however are in a more ambiguous position, and scholars are unsure whether or not the naming and inheritance of these daughters is to be lauded. Tina Pippin ("Job 42:1-6, 10-17," *Interp* 53/3 [1999], pp. 299-303 [301-302]) summarizes some of the interpretations of the epiloguean daughters, which range from their representing a satisfying, peaceful ending to the book, to their being not at all important to the book, to Wilcox's position that "what we have emphasized here is not the liberation of woman to become an



equal to man, but painted, perfumed, sexual beauty. Job's old age is blessed with the almost illicit pleasure of sexually attractive daughters. What better way to suggest again the amoral goodness of the natural order?" (p. 222). Wilcox reads this scene as disturbing, with incestuous overtones." Clines ("Why is there a Book of Job?" pp. 9-10) discusses the patriarchal treatment of Elihu, and it remains for anybody to explore Job's prologuean sons as victims of patriarchy.

³ As Clines ("Why is there a Book of Job?" p. 5) writes, "the Job of the book is *not* a poor man — even a poor man who was once rich — but a rich man, through and through, a rich man who loses his wealth, indeed, but who regains it and becomes richer than ever. And secondly, the experience the poor have of the rich is, overwhelmingly, of oppressors — of landlords, money lenders, despots. They do not know of *pious* rich men. If Job is rich *and* pious, the implication is that the story is a rich man's story, told from the perspective of the wealthy" (emphasis his).

⁴ The divisions between epilogue, prologue, and speech cycles in the Book of Job, and their consequent implications for characterization and theology, remain the most difficult areas for interpretation of the book. See Daniel Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job: Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited," *CBQ* 2/71(2009), pp. 286-305, especially pp. 286-289, for a summary of some views on the coherence or incoherence of the book. The narrative criticism used in this article, a literary critical method, approaches the book synchronically, and thereby assumes that there is one Job character, one God character, and one narrator across the text. A full exploration of the theological complexity of the text is beyond the scope of this article.

⁵ Narrators are figures within the text, characters in their own right, with gender and with an agenda. Simon Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible* [trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], p. 13), for example, writes that "the narrator is, quite simply, inside the narrative; he or she is an integral part of the work, one of its structural components, even one of the most important ones." The narrator is usually considered to speak the truth about events and other characters. Gérard Genette (cited in Alice Bach, "Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible," *Semeia* 63 [1993], pp. 61-79 [65]) "has described this narratorial function as providing the foundation of verisimilitude. When the narrator engages in extra-representational acts—'judgments, generalizations about the world, directly addressed to the narratee' (Lanser, 1992:16)—he renders the textual events (as well as characters' behaviors) more plausible (Lanser, 1992:17)." The title of this paper, "Literary Seduction," is drawn from Bach ("Signs of the Flesh," p. 66) in homage to the influence of that paper on my reading of the Book of Job.

⁶ As Bar-Efrat (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19) states, “The evidence *par excellence* of the narrator’s unlimited knowledge is undoubtedly what is reported about God, whose feelings, thoughts, intentions, opinions and judgments the narrator purports to know.”

⁷ While these narrative intrusions are usually formulaic, there are occasional divergences (3:1-2; 4:1; 6:1; 8:1; 9:1; 11:1; 12:1; 15:1; 16:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 29:1; 32:1-6; 34:1; 35:1; 36:1; 38:1; 40:1, 3, 6; 42:1). The function of these introductions is a matter of debate, but John E. Course (*Speech and Response: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Introductions to the Speeches of the Book of Job* (Chaps. 4-24) [The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 25; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994], pp. 4-5) argues that the function of the formula “and he answered and said” is three-fold: it begins a new speech, except in 40:1 “where it sets off the conclusion to a speech”; “it identifies the speaker”; and “it marks the speech as a response to the previous speaker’s discourse or to a preceding action or event as in the case of 3:1-2.”

⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 13: “We do not have direct access to the characters of a narrative, and their speech is even embedded in the narrator’s through such phrases as, ‘And he said,’ ‘And she answered.’ We see and hear only through the narrator’s eyes and ears. The narrator is an *a priori* category, as it were, constituting the sole means by which we can understand the reality which exists within a narrative.”

⁹ Bach (“Signs of the Flesh,” p. 62) defines the ideal reader as “an individual who would believe, understand, and appreciate every word and device of the text.”

¹⁰ Norman C. Habel, “In Defense of God the Sage,” in Leo G. Perdue (ed.), *Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), pp. 21-38.

¹¹ See for example Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 80. Biblical texts include: Deut. 32:18; Isa. 49:15; Hos. 11:4; God as caring/comforting mother in Isa. 46:3-4; 66:13-14; God as widwife in Isa. 66:9; 22:9-10; God like a bear robbed of her cubs in Hos. 13:8; God as mistress of a house in Ps. 123:2; God as mother eagle in Deut. 32:11-12 (all in Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* [New York: Crossroad, 1991], p. 16). In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 37, Phyllis Tribble notes for example the combination of maternal imagery with imagery of the divine in Ps. 22:9-10 [10-11] and Isa. 46:3-4. Second Isaiah and



Hosea 11 are mentioned frequently in discussions of a female biblical God, for example in Helen Schüngel-Straumann, "God as Mother in Hosea 11," in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 194-218, and Marie-Theres Wacker, "Traces of the Goddess in the Book of Hosea," in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 218-241. Nicholas Wyatt ("The Theogony Motif in Ugarit and the Bible," in Adrian H. W. Curtis, George J. Brooke, and John F. Healy [eds.], *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September, 1992* [Münster: Ugarit-Vorlag, 1994], pp. 395-419) writes of theogonic language in Ugaritic and in biblical passages in which God is figured as androgynous.

¹² That God has a womb in Job 38 has previously been noticed by for example by Tribble (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 68), by Mollenkott (*The Divine Feminine*, p. 16), and by Klein, "Job and the Womb," p. 199.

¹³ The questions posed to Job about the creation of the world, such as who "determined its measures" and "stretched the line upon it" (38:5), who "laid its corner stone" (38:6), demand the response, "God did." When Job is asked such questions as "Did you fasten the bonds of the Pleiades, or loose the bonds of Orion?" (38:31; Gray, *The Book of Job*, p. 456), the response Job must provide is, "Of course not." However, the force of these questions would be lost if God also had to respond to those questions with, "Well, neither was I, and I didn't loose the bonds of Orion either." Only if God does do these things is Job shown to be inferior to God in this capacity. In addition to responding to each of these questions with "Job didn't," it is necessary also to respond with "and God did."

¹⁴ Gregory Vall, "From Whose Womb Did the Ice Come Forth?: Procreation Images in Job 38:28-29," *CBQ* 57/3 (1995), pp. 504-513 (508-509). And yet in Prov. 3:19-20 the dew does originate with God: "The Lord by Wisdom founded the earth, established the heavens by understanding // By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the clouds drop down dew."

¹⁵ Vall, "From Whose Womb," p. 512.

¹⁶ "The majority of commentators who take sides on this issue opt for the second set of responses, but they play down the procreation analogue by reminding us that the poet is using figurative language" (Vall, "From Whose Womb," p. 509).

¹⁷ Vall, "From Whose Womb," p. 511.

¹⁸ Vall, "From Whose Womb," p. 511. Wyatt ("The Theogony Motif in Ugarit

and the Bible,” p. 412) however notes that in Job 10:12, the verb זָכַר might have a “sexual sense” in that people are the result of the sexual activity of the God. For Wyatt on androgyny and hermaphroditism see n.43 below.

¹⁹ Gibson cited in Vall, “From Whose Womb,” p. 509.

²⁰ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 68.

²¹ Klein, “Job and the Womb,” p. 199.

²² The Chaoskampf pattern, in which a god defeats or tames chaos in the form of water or a serpent and creates the world subsequently, has been identified throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. The Chaoskampf motif might have been over-identified in the biblical text. As Peter L. Trudiger (“Friend or Foe? Earth, Sea and Chaoskampf in the Psalms,” in Norman C. Habel [ed.], *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* [The Earth Bible Volume 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001], pp. 29-41 [30]) writes, “Like rabbits in the Australian bush, the Chaoskampf pattern was seen throughout the biblical writings, whenever references to a water-being and the architecture of the cosmos occurred in proximity to each other.” It is difficult nonetheless not to find such a pattern in, for example, Psalm 74 and Job 26:7-13. The mention of Leviathan in the Yhwh speeches of Job moreover undoubtedly puts those speeches within the biblical chaos tradition. See K. William Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 63; Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, Indiana, 2006), especially 1-30, for an assessment of the Chaoskampf in modern scholarship on the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern literature.

²³ The דלתים, ‘double doors’, “suggests the bolts and bar with which the triumphant Marduk confined his adversary Tiamat (‘the lower deep’) in the Babylonian cosmic myth, which culminated in creation (*ANET*, 67, ll. 139-40). . The control of the sea is God’s control over primeval chaos, the theme of the Babylonian New Year festival at the vernal equinox, and the Canaanite myth of the conflict of Baal and the unruly waters (Gordon *UT* 129 ...), which probably related to ‘the Canaanite’ New Year festival at the autumnal equinox, to which the same theme related in the Enthronement Psalms in the OT” (John Gray, *The Book of Job* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010], p.460. God seems to restrict chaos in a number of verses in the Yhwh speeches, and it can well be argued that this restriction of chaos allows for life to flourish, but also that chaos is “the stuff of life” (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], p. 99). In Job 39:30, for example, young birds survive from the blood of slain animals.

²⁴ God’s control over Leviathan and Behemoth here would then be consistent

with all other Leviathan passages in the Hebrew Bible, “including Ps. lxxiv 14 (God’s smiting of Leviathan), Ps. civ 26 (the subdued Leviathan as God’s plaything in the sea), and Amos ix 3 (the serpent, *Nāhās*, of the sea)” which all describe “an animal either defeated by God, or under the control of God” (J. V. Kinnier Wilson, “A Return to the Problems of Behemoth and Leviathan,” *VT* 25/1 (1975), pp. 1-14 (11-12).

²⁵ “Behold Behemoth, who I made (אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי) like/with you” (40:15). In Prov. 8:24, 27 it might be that God makes the deep (תְּהוֹם). In Ps. 104:6 God does cover the earth with the deep, however in that verse God does not create chaos, as such. In Ps. 104:26, though, God is said to have made (יָצַר) Leviathan.

²⁶ Giah means “to gush forth” (Gray, *The Book of Job*, p. 460).

²⁷ This has been noted by, for instance, Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 204, 222-227. That God is here imaged as a caring mother has also previously been identified by Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*, p. 27, who writes, “Anybody who has ever dressed an energetic youngster, put diapers on a kicking, squirming child, erected barriers to keep an inquisitive toddler out of harm’s way, or struggled with a playpen, should understand this amazing image. God the Mother not only gives birth to the sea, but also dresses it in mist, diapers it in black clouds, erects barriers it cannot cross, and puts it into an enormous playpen with a bolted gate!” Timothy K. Beal (*Religion and Its Monsters* [London; New York: Routledge, 2002], p. 49, also notes that this is an image of God “scolding Yam the way a parent would scold a raucous and unruly toddler, after which it is swaddled in a fresh cosmic diaper.” Contrary to the argument in this paper, he then claims that swaddling Yam in clouds integrates chaos into creation.

²⁸ Gray, *The Book of Job*, p. 460.

²⁹ “Yhwh begot me (קָנִי) at the beginning of his way, the first of his acts of old” (Prov. 8:22; JPS); set up (נִסְכָּתִי) from eternity, from the beginning before the earth (8:23), before even there were the deep (בְּאֵין־תְּהוֹמוֹת); Prov. 8:24).

³⁰ Michael V. Fox (“Amon Again,” *JBL* 115/4 [1996], pp. 699-702 [666-701, 702]) surveys the three most common interpretations of Prov. 8:30a.

³¹ See R.B.Y. Scott, “Wisdom in Creation, The ’āmôn of Proverbs VIII 30,” *VT* 10/2 (1960), pp. 213-223 (217), for a summary of reasons to read אָמוֹן as “little child.” Scott (“Wisdom in Creation,” pp. 218-219) however then dismisses that reading: “The first part of the chapter and the peroration in verses 32-36 appeal to men to listen to wisdom because of her primacy in creation, which is expressed as priority in sequence. For this high claim to grave authority the image of gay, thoughtless childhood is inappropriate.”

³² Norman C. Habel ("Of Things Beyond Me: Wisdom in the Book of Job," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 10/3 [1983], pp. 142-154 [145-146]) writes of the primacy of wisdom in creation in Proverbs 8 within his discussion of the Hymn to Wisdom in Job 28.

³³ Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSS 320; Gender, Culture, Theory 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 63, claims that "[t]he need to maintain familial and social stability in the face of enormous disruptive forces created in the male leaders and thinkers of the community a fear of chaos that was projected into an external, but nonetheless imaginary, object of fear." Camp's argument pertains to women who are outside of the typical family structure, but this is equally applicable to divine figures, gendered male or female.

³⁴ Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, p. 134.

³⁵ Job 6:4; 9:17, 34; 10:8, 16, 17; 13:15; 16:9, 12, 18; 19:6-12; 30:22-23.

³⁶ Anat is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (David Biale, "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible," *History of Religions* 21/3 [1982], pp. 240-256 [225]), and whether Anat is a sexually active goddess or not is a matter of debate. See Neal Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Mythology* (SBLDS 135; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 134, 143-144, 154-159).

³⁷ Biale ("The God with Breasts," p. 225) notes that the description of Anat as a 'suckling sword' combines images of fertility and destruction.

³⁸ Biale, "The God with Breasts," p. 225.

³⁹ Harriet Lutzky, "Shadday as Goddess Epithet," *VT* 48/1 (1998), pp. 15-36 (30): "At Ugarit, when King Keret's vow to her went unfulfilled, she 'raised her voice and shouted: . . . I will break . . .,' and then, exercising her power to curse as well as bless, brought down upon him suffering of near Job-like proportions (which, in view of Job's relation with Shadday, may be significant)."

⁴⁰ George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (London, New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2005), p. 139.

⁴¹ Dalley cited in Karen Sonik, "Gender Matters in Enūma Eliš," in Steven W. Holloway, Jo Ann Scurlock, and Richard H. Beal (eds.), *In the Wake of Tikva Frymer-Kensky* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2009), pp. 85-101 (96). The children in that account however are not human but are deities themselves.

⁴² Rivkah Harris, "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites,"



⁴³ Harris, "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox," pp. 266, 268. Harris uses the term "androgynous" to mean possessing both male and female characteristics, unlike Nicholas Wyatt (*The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* [London, Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2005], p. 238) who means by "androgyny" "a widespread metaphor, which has its origin in ancient conceptions of sexuality, concerning primordial deities and primordial men, who contain within themselves an archetype, later to be reified into the separate genders." A figure who has both male and female genitalia he calls a hermaphrodite, which is "a monster both in reality and in symbolism (as representing chaos)" (Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind*, p. 238). Wyatt (*The Mythic Mind*, p. 250) presents the womb passages from Job 38 and concludes that God is imaged here as androgynous, in his sense, though one might argue that his hermaphroditic category works equally as well.

⁴⁴ A god with female aspects, or a goddess with male aspects, is, further, not unknown in the ancient world. See Harris, "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox," and Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind*, pp. 238-255, for example.

⁴⁵ For Yhwh as monster see Roger C. Schlobin, "Prototypic Horror: The Genre of the Book of Job," *Semeia* 60 (1992), pp. 23-38 (29-32), and Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, p. 48, who writes: "Job's identification with the monstrous against God leads ultimately to God's identification with the monstrous against Job. God out-monsters Job, pushing the theological horror one monster step beyond Job's wildest expectations." See also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Rereading Culture* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25, particularly pp. 6-12, theses three and four, "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis" and "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference." A study of the androgynous or hermaphroditic characteristics of the God in Job, explored in the footnotes of this article, would be particularly fruitful given theses three and four, but that study remains to be written.

Apology

The Editorial Board of the Pacific Journal of Theology offers a sincere apology to Dr Vaai for the very poor quality of the editing and printing of this article when it first appeared in PJT Issue No54.

A Theology Of Talalasi:

Challenging the 'One Truth' Ideology of the Empire



Rev. Dr. Upolu Luma Vaai is the Head of Theology and Ethics at the Pacific Theological College in Suva Fiji.

THE RULE OF THE 'ONE TRUTH' IDEOLOGY

Since when did we think that there is *only one true story*? Since when did we institutionalize the idea that there is *only one true culture*? Since when did we internalize the notion that there is *only one true religion* and that is my religion? What makes us think that we can define the truth for others including their stories? Since when did this idea of *one truth* invade our knowledge systems?

Greek ontology, which has expressed itself fully in the Aristotelian logic, and has housed itself safely in Christian doctrines and theologies, promoted the idea that there is one universal truth. Such universal truth can be found in the process of eliminating of the opposite. According to Greek thinking, for light *to be* light, it has to eliminate its opposite: *darkness*. For God *to be* God, *flesh* has to be eliminated. This thinking was reinforced in the monotheistic understanding of God grounded in philosophical notions. That is, if God is the 'Ultimate Ground of Being', the 'Unmoved Mover,' or the 'All-seeing deity', then surely God is not comfortable with *flesh*. Through this kind of philosophical monotheism dominant in the theology of Christian missions who came to the Pacific, a divine providence was introduced which structured God around the notions of totality, linearity, and consolidation.¹ We were taught in the Church that when we think of God, we must think not in terms of the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but rather always think first of a God who exists as '*One*'. Hence we must think first of *divine substance* and only then we

can think of God as *relation*. God becomes clear and true to us when he is viewed in isolation from us. The more God is removed from *flesh*, the more he is affirmed as *the true God*. Hence is a reduction of the Trinity into *one*. This is accompanied by a hermeneutical *clean slate* approach where any perception of God must strip off all that is finite, including island cultural and ethnic associations, to get a *pure* and true picture of God.²

In such view, God has *to be* prior to *relation*. *Relation* is 'not' a necessary condition of defining the truth about God. For God to relate to what is not God would mean a weak and vulnerable deity. Or to use Schneider's words, it would mean "God stuck in a consequence of eternity."³ Now we cannot speak of God except of power, rule, and supremacy. While these divine attributes are possible in God, they are philosophical notions that can be used to support universal claims of the empire unitary system.⁴ The empire often seeks to position itself as *the one* and is always uncomfortable with diverse worldviews and alternatives that may challenge such system.⁵ Hence the embodied idea of the *tino, toto, ma aano* (body, blood, and flesh) found in the Incarnation faith is threatening to the empire. It is because the Incarnation faith puts emphasis on diversity and multiplicity.

Reducing Everything into 'One'

While this idea of *one truth* gives warrant to universal claims, the result is the reduction of everything into *one*. This is inherited continually into colonial totalitarian theologies. Such theologies support the idea of *oneness* engineered by the fixed notion of truth. Here is the beginning of totalizing God, religion, theology, and culture. Now we see that most religions, including Christianity, and most cultures, including Pacific cultures, have institutionalized this idea of *one truth* in their knowledge, educational, political, church, and village/tribal systems. And as a matter of fact, it is well documented in Pacific history that the Pacific peoples adopted the *one truth* ideology because this "empire God" could give warrant to their political, economic, and religious agendas. This is still the reality today.

For example the neo-liberal economic system, which has become the basis of globalization, is arguably the living form of this *one truth* ideology in the Pacific. It thrives in the current capitalist economic system adopted by most, if not, all Pacific countries. Pacific people are convinced by their own governments that this global market economic system is the *only* system that can sustain the wellbeing of their nation. Hence the more a nation abides with the universal economic and development policies, the more their wellbeing is improved. However the world has seen not the improvement of the majority's wellbeing, , but improvement of the system that supports a few. This *one truth* ideology has been promoted by wealthy nations such as the United States of America, and wealthy global economic institutions such as International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, since they benefit from it. ⁶ Resources often flow from the margin to benefit the Centre. What is evident is that the majority suffer because "the market sees only the need for

continually increased profit.”⁷ It responds only to the need of the institution and not to the needs of the local communities. Fortunately, some Pacific countries, such as Vanuatu, have bravely retrieved a more relational system of wellbeing entrenched in its indigenous culture as the most economically secured way to give solution to poverty and economic injustice.⁸ Unfortunately, despite efforts by local councils of chiefs as well as governments, economic disparities are rampant. James Speth might be right that this capitalist system has created “a world of wounds”,⁹ but for the Pacific it is “a world of deep infected wounds.”

These many crises linked to the *one truth* ideology demonstrate the importance for the Church to usher in a new way of thinking and a hermeneutical approach that takes seriously the diverse moral dimensions of the Pacific. That is the strong stance and aim of this article. To propose a theology that is relational to help the Church, local governments, as well as NGOs and civil societies identify and challenge the *one truth* ideology present in our systems. To do that, my task will be to reconstruct a *relational theology of God*, one that challenges the philosophical God of the *one truth* ideology and provides a solid foundation for such task. Central in this article is the assertion that we cannot solve issues in the Pacific only from an economic or scientific perspective as it is done, for instance, in the climate change debate. Without a theological perspective grounded on the relational values found in both the faith and cultures of the people, the Pacific cosmic-community¹⁰ will continue to suffer.

A THEOLOGY OF TALALASI

To reconstruct a relational theology of God, the Church must revisit the relational consciousness of the Pacific people entrenched in *culture* as well as the faith traditions of the people (*scripture* and *Church living traditions*)¹¹. It is important that these pillars underpin the proposed theology of God’s relationality. In the Pacific, relationality is the overarching value that encompasses almost, if not, all Pacific cultures. Here I want to limit myself to the Samoan understanding of relationality found in the concept of *talalasi* in order to propose a relational theology of God.

Talalasi in the Samoan Culture

In Samoa, *tala* is ‘story’, ‘version,’ or ‘narrative’ and *lasi* is ‘diverse’ or ‘multiple’. Let me discuss the word *lasi* since it is that word that changes the whole character of the word *tala*. For *lasi* to mean ‘diverse,’ or ‘multiple,’ it presupposes both beauty and relation. The phrase *ua lasi le vaai* (a view full of multiple meanings) refers to the fact that beauty is found in multiple meanings. For example, when a performance is *lasi*, it means a performance is full of variety and diversity. It suggests multiple meanings. For a performance to be *lasi*, all hidden and revealed meanings must be acknowledged and embraced by the viewer. One meaning cannot deny the other. Each is part of the whole, which makes the performance a *perfect performance*. The designation *perfect performance* depends on how the viewer creatively reinterprets the performance from his/her context. A performance without the designation *lasi* is one that lacks creativity and variety.

The Undermining of *Talalasi*

The importance of *talalasi* in Samoa has been undermined since the emergence of the idea of *tala moni* (one true version of the story). With the movement towards centralizing the gospel within the Church, the attitude towards *talalasi* changed. The Church in particular condemned many indigenous stories as false and evil. Even myths, which used to portray *spiritual and symbolic significance* of life and narrate the *sacred history* of the indigenous people, were labelled as *not true*. One of the judging criteria is that of rational scientific precision which has links to Greek philosophy. Thus, truth is found when one is able to distinguish between fiction or invented stories and facts. In doing that, one must strip all mythical elements (or supernatural elements) to arrive at what is factual and true. The problem is that by doing so one has stripped stories from their function of narrating multiple meanings. It means therefore that there will only be *one meaning* of a story. Such *one-ning* of meaning makes a single version the *only true story*. Hence the story collapses into *oneness*.

The same goes with the hermeneutical activity of the Church. Pacific theologians have been encouraging the Church to think that there is only *one meaning* of a story of the bible. That meaning was already given by the biblical author (s) who wrote the story. To get the meaning of such stories, the island reader must work first to get the meaning *intended by the author* or the meaning shaped by the *social historical context of the author* and only then can he/she *apply* it to the present context. In other words, the island reader cannot change the *given* meaning. His/her only role is to contextualise or indigenise that *given* meaning. The creative ability of the island reader is delayed until the last step, the *application*. This approach is not only colonial, but also consolidates the rule of the *one truth* ideology.

Retrieving *Talalasi*

One way of reviving the *talalasi* consciousness is that suggested by Tui Atua. Meanings of stories are couched in allusion. Allusion “was intended to suggest many meanings and to tantalise the intellect.” Stories, in the Samoan understanding, are meant to open space for multiple ways of interpretation and to invite multiple meanings.¹² Stories lose their power of transformation when there is an attempt to restrict meaning to a specific generation. Such attempts destroy the ability of future generations to suggest new meanings for the same story in a creative way applicable to their context and life.

In Samoa, when someone recites the most popular saying *e talalasi le atunuu*, it is referring to the fact that ‘there are many versions of the same story’. Because of that, a single story always has multiple meanings. Hence, each receiver of the story must deal with the fact that all meanings and versions of the same story are truth-bearing. This idea of multiple meanings is found in the hermeneutical approach often taken by those involved in the process of *faafaletui* (sharing, retelling, reconstructing stories). The *faafaletui* process reconstructs creatively the meaning of stories and myths of the past from the present context. Meanings are not rigid. The one who takes up a story and reconstructs

it will give it a new meaning. This contributes to the *ongoing reception* of the same story from generation to generation. That is how the Samoans kept alive their stories, myths, legends, and history. In this sense, truth is always relational. It is relative to the context and perspective of the receiver of the story. It is not something abstractive or universal.

Talalasi in the Life of the Triune God

The doctrine of the Trinity proposes a more relational image of God. Kallistos Ware rightly argues that “The one God of the Christian Church cannot be conceived except as Trinity.”¹³ In this Trinitarian conception, we must always believe and talk about God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is not some philosophical postulate in the sense we must guess first through reason that he is ‘one’ and only then we talk about how the Son and Spirit *relate* to that God. Indeed we know God through Christ in the Spirit. To miss the Father, Son, and Spirit is to miss the whole idea of God as relational.

Now talking about the Father, Son, and Spirit brings us to the Incarnation. In Trinitarian theology, we cannot understand God without the Incarnation. That was Athanasius’ greatest contribution to theology. He suggested that the Incarnation, especially the passion, cross, and the death of the Son must determine our understanding of who God is.¹⁴ The Son is at the centre of defining who God is. In other words the Incarnation introduces a *talalasi* life of God that is not only *multi-dimensional* but also *ground-up*, a life that embraces the depth of our diverse beings as well as our stories. It is also fundamental to redefining divine providence from a Christological perspective.

Le Atua Liu Tino Tagata

In Samoa, God incarnated is translated ‘*le Atua liutino tagata*’ (*Atua* is ‘God’, *liutino* is ‘incarnate’, and *tagata* is ‘human form’). Two important facts need to be affirmed. First is that for God to *liutino* means that the whole of God became embodied in human form through Christ. It doesn’t mean that *one part* of him (humanity) became localized while the *other part* (divinity) is still in suspense to save God from the consequence of losing divinity.¹⁵ *Tino* involves blood, flesh, bones, and body. To *liutino* means the whole of God is fully localized as a *toto ma aano* (blood and flesh). God is not a concept or idea. God is *tagata*.

Second is that for God to *liu tino tagata* means therefore that God is a ‘relational God’. *Tagata* in the Pacific is always relational.¹⁶ It is never individual. The word *tino* can function as a hermeneutical tool here to reconstruct the Incarnation. In Samoa as well as the Pacific, *tino* refers to a body of relations that constitute a person. In this regard, one’s father, mother, extended family, land, ancestors, spirits, environment, are a body of relations that constitute a Pacific *tagata*. These are all parts of the *tino*. And they are called *itu tino*. So the idea of *embodiment* is very strong in the Pacific understanding of *tagata*. Because the *tagata* embodies all *itu tino*, to deny one *itu tino* is to deny oneself. This is probably the reason why the translators of the Samoan bible translate the Body of Christ, the church, as the *Tino o Keriso*. The word *tino* has a powerful hermeneutical function in defining the relational nature of the church.



When the Samoan bible says, *Aua foi o le tino e le se itu tino e tasi lea, ae peitai o itu tino e lasi*, translated 'Indeed the body does not consist of one part but of many' (1 Corinthians 12:14), it is referring to the fact each *itu tino* are diverse yet integrally part of the other. For the foot to deny the hand from belonging to the *tino* is the same as denying oneself. All these *itu tino* not only constitute a *tagata*, but also all are embodied in a *tagata*. To see a *tagata* is to see not just an individual, but the whole. Therefore to say that God *liutino tagata* means not only that the whole of God was 'in' the Son (Father and Spirit), but also in the Son we see a relational image of God who embraces all *itu tino*.

The question is: Does God's *liutino tagata* diminish his divinity? Does it minimise God's being? In Greek logic, the answer is 'YES.' Because the divinity is now engulfed in the *tino* (which is matter), therefore God must *either* be divine *or* human. He cannot be *both*. In the *talalasi* consciousness, the answer is 'NO'. Far from disproving God, the *liutino tagata* affirms he is God. Hence, for God *to be* God is *to be a tagata*. In other words, to be relational. This is evident in Paul's discussion of the *kenotic* being of God in Philippians 2:1-11. For him, the more Christ goes deeper into the diverse stories of human suffering, pain, and death, the more he is glorified and honored as God. It doesn't mean that Son was divine, then became human when he incarnated, then became divine again when returned to the Father. However it means that God became fully divine in human form. By giving himself completely, God became fully God. That is why the 'cross' is the defining point of understanding God's being. In the cross of the Son, the Father *pours out all he has* to the whole creation through the Spirit. And it is in that *pouring all* that the Son becomes *Lord of all*.

Theolocology

The word *tino* and *tagata* reinforce a more practical twist to the theology of Incarnation. *Tino* in Samoa not only refers to a body of relations but also to *praxis*. This is found in the term *faatino* (to do, to perform, to act, to execute) or the word *faitino* (to become embodied, concrete, real). For God to *liu tino tagata* means that he is not a hypothesis. Rather he is a concrete God who is actually *faatino* and the one who *faatino*. A *talalasi* consciousness suggests that any attempt to theologize should take seriously the idea of 'theolocology' (*theo* is 'God', *loca* is 'local context', and *logy* is 'story'). *Theolocology* challenges an *imposed story* (either God's, others', or ours) often represented in the traditional term 'theology'. In *theolocology*, 'God's story' through Christ in the Spirit (*theos*) is creatively reconstructed from the perspective of the 'local story' of the people (*loca*) in order to produce a liberating 'new story' (*logy*). Some would argue that this approach can be relativistic in the sense it takes the context of the people as the primary datum. Marion Grau argues that this might be "prone to inflicting damage when we claim to understand and thus control the...expression of the Divine."¹⁷ However, I argue that there is no other approach that is faithful to the Incarnation faith except that which takes what conditions us in the Pacific as the starting point in doing theology. But such approach must always be a dialogical *back and forth* hermeneutical process where we read the context in the light of *theos* (Triune God as witnessed in Scripture and proclaimed in Church

doctrines), and we read *theos* from the perspective of the community's *location*. The result should be a *new story* of liberation and redemption. In this way, our story becomes God's story through Christ in the Spirit, while God's story becomes our story through Christ in the Spirit. Christ is at the centre of this mutual exchange of stories. Christ is God's story for us, while Christ is also our story for God. Without denying them, Christ healed our stories for God. *Theolocalogy* is about the continuation of that exchange.

In other words, *theolocalogy* challenges a top-down approach to truth that is *not real* and suggests a more *praxis* ground-up approach in understanding and imaging God in the world. It challenges our *disembodied mentality* where stories of many *itu tino* have either reduced into *one*, erased, invaded, or silenced by political, economic, and religious systems. It gives promise to trivialized stories that are continually whispered into invisibility in fear of repercussions. It also challenges the *Tino o Keriso* to reconnect to *itu tino* "where trauma finds a home", to use Marcia Shoop's words, in order to give them hope.¹⁸ It seeks to confront theologies and ideologies that conspire to condemn the painful stories of those who are part of our *tino*. For example stories of *climate change* in Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands, the *colonial atrocities* in West Papua, Kanaki, and Bougainville, the Australian *continued colonization* of Nauru through refugees detention centres, and the *nuclear testing* in Maohi and French Polynesia, to name a few. In *theolocalogy*, the promise is that *tino* matters and that every *itu tino* must be embraced and liberated in order to experience the love of the Triune God.

A Talalasi Middle Ground to Individualism and Communalism

The problem we see in the West is that it has lost being communal and relational because of the emphasis on the individual self. This is often termed *individualism*. Such an extreme view draws on the Greek logic mentioned before that *to be* is always prior to *relation*. The 'I' must think first whether a relationship fits his/her standards, life, and framework, and only then he/she relates. The summary of this position is clearly demonstrated in John Zizioulas' words: "you first are and then you relate."¹⁹ In this sense, diversity can be very unhealthy. The self is too centralized to the extent of denying others.

The problem we have in the Pacific is the opposite. For fear of losing unity in the midst of foreign invasion, the Pacific has moved more into *communalism* that it fails to give individuals the freedom *to be* themselves or to define their *otherness*. It's not that because relationality cannot be found in the Pacific, but because its cultures are predominantly shaped by the *one truth* ideology. We see so much turmoil in Pacific communities because the rights of individuals are marginalized, denied, or even taken away by force. For example, Pacific churches continue to uphold a system that not only develops the institution at the expense of its members but also one that denies transparency and accountability. Individual members including pastors are silenced from freely expressing their views in fear of damaging the church's reputation. In some churches, women are not given the right to participate effectively in the ordination ministry. Village and tribal councils have not only enforced rules that continue to give power to



male members to rule over women, but also enforced a system that denies the rights of minority groups. Diversity and multiplicity has become weaker and weaker in the Pacific because of the sole emphasis on unity.

A possible solution to the problem can be found in the life of the Trinity. In God's relationality, God does not exist first, and only then he relates. God is nothing other than relationality. Relationality makes God, God. Zizioulas put's it correctly that without relationality, "it would not be possible to speak of the being of God."²⁰ God's relationality proposes a *talalasi* middle ground where *both* connection *and* distinction, *both* unity *and* diversity are embraced. This *both/and* way of thinking, with roots in the Patristic fathers, especially the Cappadocians, is crucial to upholding and valuing both extremes.²¹ In this Patristic idea, each individual *itu tino* (either the Father or Son or the Spirit) are distinct in their stories. The Father's story is one of salvation. The Son's story is one of performing salvation. The Spirit's story is one of giving that salvation. However, each story is not totally removed from the other, but rather *perichoretically* interrelated, meaning the stories *co-inhere*, creating a *united story*. Therefore C.S. Song is right to claim that "God is story."²² In this sense, each divine *itu tino* are distinct without losing their unity. They are also united without losing their individuality. In the light of this *talalasi* middle ground, it is not relational when there is total unity without distinction. Likewise it is also not relational when there is total distinction without unity.

Because of this *both/and* mentality in the Trinity, therefore one's story becomes a story of the whole triune *tino*. The Son's story of pain and suffering, even his story of the cross, has become part of the story of the whole Triune *tino*. That is why the suffering of one *itu tino* (Son) is the suffering of the whole. Jurgen Moltmann calls it the *suffering love* of the whole.²³ The one *itu tino* (Son) cannot exist apart from the whole Triune *tino* (Father, Son, and Spirit), and the whole Triune *tino* cannot exist without that *itu tino*. The Father, Son, and Spirit are woven together in a mutual relationality so that they can neither deny the other (Western extreme) nor dominate the other (Pacific extreme). Hence Christ in the Spirit is the summary of the Father's story of salvation. In the next section, we will see how God implants his relational *talalasi* nature explicitly in creation.

Talalasi in the Biblical Story of Creation

The story of creation in Genesis 1-2:3 begins not with *creation out of nothing* (creatio ex nihilo) but rather with *creation reduced to nothing*. It begins with a reduction force called *chaos*; a formless void. Catherine Keller is right to argue that chaos plays a role in the Genesis narrative. However I do not agree with the idea that chaos should be given a central role in defining the coming of the world into being.²⁴ Chaos represents a system of *oneness* where there is *total fusion* without distinction, *total mixture* without separation; a system that empties everything into a formless void. In other words, chaos is a form of *relational poverty*, a poverty that is now also engulfing our world by force. The darkness that appears over the surface of the deep introduces a dominant totalitarian force that stands by itself without the need of the other: *light*. If darkness is to stand alone then light is consumed in it only to be separated on the first day of creation. In fact this consuming element is also found in the word *colonization*.

It comes from the root word *colon* meaning *to digest*. Hence colonization is the digestion of one culture by another, one religion by another, or one economy by another.

The reduction and consuming of everything into one reappears in the Tower of Babel where the unity that people seek is a "coercive unity without freedom and without diversity."²⁵ Hinne Wagenaar challenges the long standing interpretation by Claus Westermann and Gerhard von Rad that the scattering of the Tower of Babel is a divine punishment for humans for overstepping their limits. Wagenaar argues that rather than punishment, this is actually God's intervention to dismantle an unhealthy *tower power unity* to liberate the victims of the Babel colonial system. Hence from a system of *one* people with *one* language, God introduced a system of *many* people with *diverse* languages.²⁶ For the creation story to begin with chaos is a reminder of the world's constant lack of an intrinsic hold of relationality. Sin therefore, introduced in the latter chapters of Genesis, is the *absence of relationality* and a lapse back to the *power of oneness*; a return to *relational poverty*.

Va-rious Creation

The *talalasi* being of God becomes explicit through an introduction of a *va-rious* type of creation. *Various* is different from *Va-rious*. The former refers to different varieties that do not always relate. The latter means that there is diversity but a diversity that can only be defined in mutual relationality. In the narrative, God's reaction to the world's deterioration towards *oneness* is *relationality*. On the first day, God starts with *separation*, freeing creation from the *power of oneness*. He starts by giving light and darkness their spaces of existence and free movement. God's act of diversification is an inescapable revelation of his nature in a world controlled by the *power of oneness*. This will continue throughout creation. God in this sense *va-riously* creates the world. *Va-rious* creation means God separates light and darkness, but they can only exist in relation to the other. Hence they can only exist because of a *va*, a mutual reciprocal respect and honouring of the other. Without this *va*, creation could easily lapse back into either *oneness* (a position held by the Pacific) or develop into various individuals (position held by the West).

In the account, God does not eliminate darkness from creation. This is a mistake we often do in our theological interpretation. Elimination is not part of God's *talalasi* nature. God still includes darkness, but rather decentralizes it, stripping it of its claim to superiority. When God said, "let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), the phrase '*let be*' plays a central role in God's *va-rious* creation. To '*let be*' means to set free from the coercion of a system that privileges control.²⁷ God's role was to liberate light from the *control of oneness* executed by darkness in order to let light be light. At the same time, God also liberates darkness from the *power of oneness* to rightly take its place in creation.

Darkness and light are now given distinct spaces and names (1:4). But in a *va-rious* creation they should exist in an economy of relationality where they give and receive from the other both respect and honour. Light gives birth to day by introducing morning, and darkness gives birth to night by introducing



evening (1:4). Hence both their roles in creation contribute to forming what we call *day* (combination of light and darkness). Without this complementary relationship, there would be no *first day*. Therefore for darkness, God has given a new way of being in the world, realizing new dimensions of relationality as it takes on responsibility for the other. Likewise for light, God's *va-rious* creation means that the freedom of diversity is not the freedom *to be*, but rather the freedom *to relate*.

The '*let be*' act of God in the first five days where God separates water, land, seas, sky, animals, as well as birds is often followed by the phrase "God saw it was good". Hence the good judgment appears only when everything is '*let be*'. In this sense, creation is good because each has been given their diverse spaces to exist, privileging the economy of relationality. More than just creating, God was re-adjusting, transforming, and freeing creation from the rule of *oneness*, a rule that has no *va*.

Towards the end, the '*let be*' act of God immediately changed to the '*let us*' in verse 26. When God said, "let us make man in our image", the '*let us*' is a divine resolve for internal re-adjustments in divine being, a re-adjustment whereby God now agrees to share his own divine image to that which is not God. Such image is the *image of relationality*. This is the beginning of *God's openness* to the world. For God, the liberation of creation from the *power of oneness* can be fully realized through internal re-adjustments. Such a model must challenge all indigenous, contextual, and postcolonial developments that we cannot change the empire unless there are complete internal readjustments to our already imperial systems and beliefs.

When God created humanity, it was a *va-rious* creation of *both* male and female (1:27), a huge leap from the *either/or* structure of *oneness* dominant in the beginning of creation where only darkness ruled. Therefore, the rule of humanity over creation should be shaped by the nature of God as *talalasi* where sharing, reciprocal giving and receiving, as well as respecting and giving space for the other in creation to exist are fundamental. With this readjustment, humanity has a moral obligation to protect creation from going back to chaos, from total fusion, and from emptying all stories into a formless void. To do that, humanity must initially protect itself from lapsing back into *relational poverty*. The Sabbath on the seventh day is the celebration of the fulfilment of implanting divine relationality in creation. Sabbath is a symbol of *relational richness* for all of creation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A theology of *talalasi* is grounded on the *relational consciousness* found in both the *cultures* and the *faith* traditions of the Pacific people. It aims to give ground to a conscience that is relational to assist in the decolonizing of our political, economic, education, and religious systems. It challenges the *one truth* ideology that now dominates the world today including the Pacific where everyone and everything is reduced to one system, one culture, one religion, and one way of doing things. A theology of *talalasi* speaks of a relational God who is

real and concrete through Christ in the Spirit. A God who not only embraces all stories of different cultures, religions, gender, families, persons, and generations, but also one who is not comfortable with the idea of *oneness* and coercive unity entrenched in many of our systems. It proposes the fact that all stories are *truth-bearing* because God himself is now part of those stories through his *liu tino tagata* through Christ in the Spirit. Overall the theology of *talalasi* proposes relationality as a moral guidance to all decisions and actions of the Church, governments, villages, NGOs, and civil societies.

Notes

¹ Upolu Luma Vaai, 'Motu ma le Taula: Towards an Island *Let Be* Hermeneutics,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 53 (2015):31.

² Upolu Luma Vaai, 'Vaatapalagi: De-Heavening Trinitarian Theology in the Islands,' in *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 42.

³ Lauren Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

⁴ The word *empire* is not just about how resources flow from the margin to the centre or how power is accumulated at the top of the hierarchy as Lee Griffiths contends. It also refers to anything to do with 'our' thirst for greatness, power, and authority to dominate, rule, coerce, diminish, suppress, silent, or reduce everything and everyone into *one*. The notion of *empire* that is challenged in this article is more of an internal one; the one we not only create in us but also in the political, economic, religious, educational, and social systems we belong to. For Griffiths argument, see Lee Griffiths, *God is Subversive: Talking Peace in a Time of Empire* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), x.

⁵ Berry Friesen and John K. Stoner, *If Not Empire, What? A Survey of the Bible*, www.bible-and-empire.net, 2014, 13.

⁶ For more information on the control of USA and global economic institutions on the world, see Arundhati Roy, *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (London: Harper, 2004), 40.



- ⁷ Alan Greenspan in his report to the US House Government Oversight and Reform Committee, paraphrased by Kevin Barr, *Economic Systems and Social Justice: Corporate Greed or the Common Good*(Suva: Wailoku, 2012), 5.
- ⁸ *Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia: Vanuatu Pilot Study Report* (Vanuatu: Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, 2012).
- ⁹ James Gustave Speth, *Getting to the Next System: Guideposts on the Way to a New Political Economy* (The Next System Project, 2015), 5. See <http://thenextsystem.org>
- ¹⁰ *Cosmic-community* captures the Pacific understanding that everyone and everything belongs to the community. Community is not *anthropological* in the sense referring only to people. Rather it is *cosmological* in the sense referring to all of life.
- ¹¹ I borrow the term ‘*living tradition*’ from Orm Rush to highlight a shift away from a static notion of tradition to a more dynamic living reception of doctrines and accepted beliefs of the church in which what is received are not mere doctrines, but rather the living God. See Orm Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful & the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2009), 176ff.
- ¹² Tui Atua, ‘More on Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor,’ in *Su’esu’e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, eds. Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni et.al.(Lepapaigalagala: National University of Samoa, 2008), 71f.
- ¹³ Kallistos Ware, ‘The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation’, in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 107.
- ¹⁴ John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 1:198.
- ¹⁵ See Behr for more of this. Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 221f.
- ¹⁶ *Tagata* is a generic term for ‘person’ throughout many islands of the Pacific. For example, *Tagata* (Samoa), *Tangata* (Tonga and Maori), *Kanaka* (Hawaii), *Tamata* (Fiji), *Taata* (Maohi), and so forth.
- ¹⁷ Marion Grau, *Refiguring Theological Hermeneutics: Hermes, Trickster, Fool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.
- ¹⁸ Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 48f.
- ¹⁹ John Zizioulas, ‘Relational Ontology: Insights from Patristic Thought’, in *The Trinity in an Entangled World*, 146.
- ²⁰ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in the Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985), 17.

²¹ Zizioulas, 'Relational Ontology,' 148ff.

²² C. S. Song, 'In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts,' *Theologies and Cultures* 5 (2008): 5-27, see pg. 12ff.

²³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM, 1981), 30ff.

²⁴ Catherine Keller, 'Be the Fish: A Theology of Creation out of Chaos,' *Word & World* 32 (2012):16.

²⁵ Hinne Wagenaar, 'Babel, Jerusalem and Kumba: Missiological Reflections on Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 2:1-13,' *International Review of Mission* 92 (2003):406-421, see pg. 410.

²⁶ Wagenaar, 'Babel, Jerusalem and Kumba,' 408ff.



Book Review

Teleke Lauti, *Breaking through the wall: The coming of the church to Nanumaga in Tuvalu*. Nanumaga, Tuvalu: Ekalesia Kelesiano Nanumaga, 2010. Pbk xi + 182 pp. No ISBN.

In *Breaking through the wall* Teleke Lauti gives an account of the arrival, establishment, struggles and survival, of the Ekalesia Kelisiano in Nanumaga, Tuvalu. This account has at the background the arrival of Christianity to Tuvalu and the establishment of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT).

Chapter 1, "The arrival of the Good News to Tuvalu," recognizes deacon Elekana of Rarotoga as the first Christian to come to Tuvalu when his raft landed at Nukulaelae on 8 June 1861. He and eight others were travelling from Manihiki to Lakahaga, but strong winds brought them to Nukulaelae, and some unfortunately did not survive their landing. Elekana stayed for two months then left for training at Malua Theological College, Samoa. This chapter also records the names and works of the native missionaries who started and sustained the church in the other seven islands of Tuvalu: Funafuti, Nukufetau, Nui, Vaitupu, Niutao, Nanumea, Nanumaga.

Chapter 2, "Prior to the arrival of the Gospel to Nanumaga," explains how the settlement of people at Nanumaga began from the warrior Lapi, his wife Hauimalae, and their four children. This chapter is an insightful and valuable peak into the structure and customs of Nanumaga, and a reminder that each of the islands of Tuvalu has its peculiarities and complexities. There are cultural and language diversities even in small island nations!

Chapter 3, "Foreign missionaries to Nanumaga, Tuvalu," attends to the focus and purpose of this book. It is interesting for me as a cultural critic that Lauti

uses the label “foreign missionaries” in the title of the chapter to refer to Samoans. Others might use “native missionaries.” Missionaries from Samoa served at Nanumaga from 1875 to 1945, and their names and accomplishments are listed and appreciated, with some highlights shared. Not everything was smooth sailing, as there were tensions due in part to the cultural differences between Samoa and Tuvalu. Those tensions, of course, are evidence that the missionaries were foreign to Tuvalu!

Chapter 4, “Opportunity Opens for Tuvaluan Pastors,” names and gives brief accounts of the work of Tuvaluan pastors in Nanumaga from 1945 to 2010. There were gaps now and then, which were filled by deacons. The local pastors also faced challenges, especially from new religious movements that fished for membership from within the walls of EKT. This caused tensions in the community, strife in the *fale kaupule*, pain in the lives of the pastors and their families, removal of the king of the island, and litigation at the High Court of Tuvalu. Notwithstanding, the Ekalesia Kalisiano Nanumaga continued with worship services, societal and building projects.

Chapter 5, “Organizing Groups and Special Days of the Church,” describes various church groups and their activities. This chapter looks inside the work of the church in the present day, while Chapter 6, “Education, Environment and Globalization Impacts,” turns to the global scene. The connection between the environment and globalization causes a lot of pain for Tuvalu as a whole, being the island nation that experiences the King Tide once a year and shares with other low-lying islands the anxieties that climate change brings.

Chapter 7, “Other Religions,” deals with the other denominations or sects that have arrived to Nanumaga. Insofar as EKT is the established and mainline church in Tuvalu, and in practice the official church of the nation, the new sects are troublesome (as addressed in Chapter 4).

Chapter 8, “Sons and Daughters of Nanumaga in the Mission Fields,” complements Chapters 3 and 4. People from Nanumaga went out to other countries, among them were the parents of Toaripi Lauti, who was Chief Minister, then Prime Minister of Tuvalu at independence, before serving as Governor General. Toaripi was born in PNG, so technically, if one follows Lauti’s logic in Chapter 3, he too was a foreigner!

Chapter 9, “The Bible in the Local Language,” explains the translation of the first Tuvaluan Bible and the Tuvalu Study Bible. Prior to the Tuvaluan translation, the Samoan translation was used in Tuvalu. In this regard, in my opinion, the translation of the bible into the Tuvaluan language marked the end of Samoan control over the work and language of the EKT.

The book closes with several lists that are meaningful to island readers, especially the birth, baptism, marriage and death records of Nanumaga.

This book will not receive wide circulation, but it is relevant and critical for the recording of the story of the church in Tuvalu and the region. It is in island-style and done by a local writer. It puts into writing the memories of local people, which needs to be recorded because memories too drift and drown.



I am hopeful that the same work will be done for the other islands of Tuvalu, including Niulakita, which tends to slip the attention of record keepers, as well as Kioa, even though it is in another political jurisdiction. May other island churches in Oceania be inspired to also do the same.

Jione Havea

Book Review submitted to *Pacific Journal of Theology*



Information for Contributors

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- ◆ original articles in the theological disciplines
- ◆ articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues and other academic disciplines
- ◆ helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational)
- ◆ artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music)
- ◆ notes and reviews of books that are relevant for Pacific Christians
- ◆ information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.



Guidelines for Authors : The Editorial Board will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of the journal. Articles in English, French or Pacific languages will be considered. Poetry, photographs and black and white drawings are also welcome. Manuscripts must be previously unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Review policy: Criteria for Acceptance : Following initial screening, papers are reviewed by two or more board members, using these criteria:

- Relevance and/or currency of interest to the Pacific Islands.
- Contribution to current debates.
- Originality, balance, scholarship.
- ♦ Argument, organisation and presentation. the final decision to publish is retained by the Editor and the Editorial Board, who may also suggest editorial changes for all articles submitted for publication.

♦
Submissions, addressed to the Editor, *PJT*, (see SPATS contact address, inside front cover), **must** comply with the following requirements:

Maximum length: 6000 words (book reviews 1000 words) including notes.

Style: Australian Government Publishing Service, *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, 5th edn; or the 6th edn revised by Snooks & Co. and published by Wiley in 2002.

Spelling: British (not American) spelling is preferred. Follows the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

Notes: In the manuscript, all notes, commencing on a new page, must be double-spaced end- (and not foot-) notes. Notes should be substantive only not documentation. In

the text, the identifier, if in superscript, should be outside the punctuation, like this: 'If you use the Insert, Notes facility, the program will superscript for you. If you prefer to construct your list of notes manually, you will have to set the identifiers manually too. Alternatively, you may just indicate it in parentheses, thus: (1) In his case, you will have to construct your list of notes manually.'

Author and date referencing in text (surname date:page) e.g. at the end of a clause or sentence, (Ernst 1994:8); or, within a sentence, 'Little (1996:212) notes that.....'

Reference list, commencing on a new page, of all (and only) cited references listed alphabetically by author and, within author, by date, title and publisher. Use italics for book and journal titles, single inverted commas and minimal capitalisation for article titles, and no markings for presented papers or unpublished texts. Chapters and articles should show page numbers. See *Style*, e.g.:

Ernst, Manfred, 1994,
Winds of Change: rapidly growing religious groups in the Pacific Islands, Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva.

Little, Jeanette, 1996, '... and wife: Mary Kaaialii Kahelem-auna Nawaa, missionary wife and missionary', in *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific*, eds Doug Munro & Andrew Thornley, Pacific Theological College & Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, pp. 210–34.

Cover page: A separate cover page must include: title, author's name, affiliation, postal, fax and e-mail addresses, and a list of any maps, figures etc. accompanying the text. Please include brief biographical data and a head-and-shoulders photo of the author, with any necessary information about the paper, e.g. details of where it was presented, in the case of a conference paper

Maps, Tables, Diagrams, Graphs, Photographs: Indicate location in text and include the electronic copy for the material at the end of the file, each on a separate page; or in separate files; or submit camera-ready copies on separate pages. Publication will be b & w. Any necessary attribution notes and copyright clearances are author's responsibility.

Computer processing: MS Word preferred.

Format: A4 paper, double or 1½ spacing, 5cm spaces all margins, font 11 or 12 point Times Roman, left aligned; all pages numbered sequentially at bottom of pages. Minimal formatting. *Italics* (or marked by underlining) may be shown where appropriate. Subheads: **Bold**, left aligned, minimal capitalisation. Sub-subheads: *Italics*, left aligned, minimal caps. A lot of formatting will have to change in the final layout so the less you put in the better.

Electronic submission: E-mail attachments addressed to the editor at the SPATS e-address are the fastest. A 3.5" diskette or CD-ROM is also acceptable. The electronic file must contain *all* files relevant to the manuscript. If hard copy is submitted, it is helpful to provide an electronic file as well.



South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS)

P.O. Box 2426, Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji

*Tel. (679) 330-3924 / 3301942; Email: info@spatsfj.org **OR** admin@spatsfj.org*

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Ekalesia Kelesiano Nanumaga, 2010. Pbk xi + 182 pp. No ISBN.

Author: Jione Havea